

both right. And any serious argument about culture—which has to be, finally, an argument about truth—must honor that complexity.

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## The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer

BY MARTIN JAY

On February 8, 1889, Siegfried Kracauer was born in Frankfort am Main, the son of a businessman, Adolf K. Kracauer and his wife, the former Rosette Oppenheim; he died seventy-seven years later in New York City on November 26, 1966. For any normal biography, this bracketing of a life between two chronological points is a natural and unexamined beginning. For a biography of Kracauer, however, it constitutes a betrayal of the strongest taboo of his later life, a taboo he expressed in a series of letters deliberately set aside in his well-organized *Nachlass*<sup>1</sup> to give any future biographer pause. These letters, written in the 1960s when Kracauer was consumed by his final project on the philosophy of history, were filed under the heading of "extraterritoriality." In all of them, Kracauer vehemently opposed any effort to disclose his correct age, a campaign, as he surely must have known, which could only meet with temporary success.<sup>2</sup> His reason for waging it, despite the certainty of ultimate failure, transcended the petty vanity of those who refuse to age gracefully. As he wrote to his friend Theodor

Kracauer's *Nachlass* was deposited in 1973 in the Schiller National Museum in Marbach am Neckar. All letters quoted in the text can be found there, although I consulted the correspondence with Leo Lowenthal in Professor Lowenthal's own collection in Berkeley, California. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Werner Volcke and the staff of the Schiller National Museum for their courtesy and helpfulness during my stay in Marbach. I also must thank former friends of Kracauer for granting me illuminating interviews: Rudolf Arnheim, Bernard Karpel, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Leo Lowenthal, Hans Mayer, Sheldon Meyer, Henry Pachter, Meyer Schapiro, and the editor of his collected works, Karsten Witte. Leo Lowenthal, Karsten Witte, and as always, my wife, Cathy Gallagher, made helpful comments on the manuscript's first draft.

<sup>2</sup> The only instance of "success" I have found is in the article by Hans G. Helms entitled "Der wunderliche Kracauer," *Neues Forum* (June, July, 1971), p. 27, where Kracauer's age in 1964 is said to be 70, when it was in fact 75.

W. Adorno in 1963: "It is not as if there is something for me in appearing young or younger; it is simply the horror of losing chronological anonymity through the fixating of a date and the unavoidable connotations of such a fixation."<sup>3</sup>

The "chronological anonymity" he so insistently guarded had two functions. First, it helped discourage efforts to place Kracauer in the context of any one period, such as those that would define him as a "Weimar intellectual" with all the resonances that label has acquired over the years. By avoiding such a placement, he hoped to thwart the compartmentalization of his own work that he had sought to resist in the work of those he studied. But secondly, and perhaps more significantly, on a psychological level, it served to ward off thoughts of the approaching death that would signify the closure of his work and give his life whatever final meaning it might have. When he finally did die, Adorno wrote in his obituary that Kracauer's utter refusal to confront death or aging had a heroic dimension to it, consonant with his longstanding concern for the redemption of the living.<sup>4</sup> To Kracauer, final meanings were anathema, whether in cultural phenomena or the record of a man's life. Wholeness and death were inextricably intertwined in his thinking, an association that energized much of his thought and set him apart from the Weimar intellectuals who, in Peter Gay's phrase, "hungered for wholeness."<sup>5</sup>

Kracauer's concern for "chronological anonymity" grew out of a more general fascination with the condition he chose to call "extraterritoriality." Marginality, alienation, outsidership have been among the stock obsessions of intellectuals ever since the time of Rousseau. Few, however, focused as consistently on the manifestations of the malaise throughout their entire careers as did Kracauer. Few still found ways to fashion their own marginality into a positive good in quite the manner he did. As we shall see, Kracauer's life's work can be read as a series of seemingly disparate projects almost all with the common goal of redeeming contingency from oblivion. In important, not fully transparent ways, this effort paralleled Kracauer's personal struggle with the "extra-territorial" nature of his own life.

3 Kracauer to Adorno, November 8, 1963. The other correspondents with whom he discussed his "chronological anonymity" were Erika Lorenz, Michel Ciment, and Hans Kohn. Unless otherwise indicated, the letters were written in German and translated by me.

4 Theodor W. Adorno, "Siegfried Kracauer Tot," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (December 1, 1966), p. 20.

5 Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, 1968), chapter 1.

Kracauer's sense of marginality must have begun almost at birth. Physically, he was set apart from his peers by two characteristics. The first was a speech defect, a stammer which would preclude, among other things, a teaching career at any time in his life. The second was his physiognomy, whose peculiarity struck all who knew him. To Adorno, who actually used the word "extra-territorial" in describing his face, he looked as if he were from the Far East.<sup>6</sup> Asja Lacis, the Latvian Marxist director who met him in the late 1920s, said he looked like an "African."<sup>7</sup> To Hans Mayer, the Marxist literary critic, he was a "Japanese painted in an Expressionist."<sup>8</sup> And Rudolf Arnheim, the aesthetic theoretician, remembers him as having a squashed nose that made his face, "almost grotesque, but somehow beautiful."<sup>9</sup>

Added to whatever stress may have been caused by these physical peculiarities was the trauma of his father's death, when Kracauer was still a young child. He moved shortly thereafter to the house of his uncle, Theodor K. Kracauer, a distinguished historian of Frankfurt's Jewish community.<sup>10</sup> The atmosphere of the home was apparently religious, but the young Kracauer, like so many of his generation, sought assimilation rather than ethnic identification. Later, in the 1920s, he became friendly with the circle around the powerfully attractive Rabbi Meir Simcha Nobel, which included Ernst Simon, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig. He even contributed a piece to the Rabbi's *Gesellschaft* in 1921,<sup>11</sup> but seems to have played no role in the creation of the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus* which emerged from Nobel's circle. By 1926, however, what interest he may have had in the Jewish revival stimulated by the *Lehrhaus* group was clearly dead. In that year, he published a scathing criticism of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation of the Bible,

6 Asja Lacis, *Revolutionär im Beruf; Berichte über proletarischer Theater, über Brecht, Benjamin, und Piscator*, ed. Hildegard Brenner (Munich, 1971), p. 12.

7 Conversation with Professor Mayer, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 30, 1973.

8 Conversation with Professor Arnheim, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 21, 1973.

9 The most notable work was a two volume *Geschichte der Juden in Frankfurt a.M. (1150-1824)* published posthumously in 1925 and 1927 with the editorial help of his wife, Hedwig. He was supported by the Jewish Community of Frankfurt in this endeavor.

10 "Gedanken über die Freundschaft," in *Gabe Herrn Rabbiner Dr. Nobel zum 50. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt, 1921). This was the second part of an essay whose first part appeared as "Über die Freundschaft," *Logos*, VII, 2 (Tübingen, 1917/18). Both parts were published by Suhrkamp in 1972.

which he damned as neo-völkisch in inspiration.<sup>12</sup> Thereafter, Jewish issues played no overt role in any of his writings, although certain residues can perhaps be said to have remained if the religious element in his interest in redemption is stressed. Still, what his upbringing in a religious household whose tenets he rejected meant was a strengthening of that marginality which characterized his life. After 1933, the myth of assimilation was exploded in a way that could only have reinforced his sense of outsidership. Although Kracauer never dealt directly with the consequences of his Jewish background, there can be little doubt that it played a serious role in the development of his sensibility and intellectual concerns.

Kracauer's career pattern shows equal signs of deviation from the norm of intellectual maturation, if indeed such a norm can be said to exist. Before the first world war, he studied at the Klinger-Oberrealschule in Frankfurt and then at universities and technical colleges in Darmstadt, Berlin, and Munich. Although preparing fields in philosophy, and sociology, his main interest was in architecture, which he hoped to make his career. In 1915, he earned a doctorate in engineering at the technical college of Berlin-Charlottenburg with a dissertation on the development of wrought iron decorations in Prussia from the 17th to the 19th centuries.<sup>13</sup> During the war, he seems to have avoided serious military service, if his semi-autobiographical novel, *Ginster*,<sup>14</sup> is any indication. Instead, he served as an apprentice architect in Hannover, Osnabruck, Frankfurt, and Munich.

Although architecture was only to be a temporary career, it left its mark on Kracauer's subsequent development. His heightened visual sensitivity, "the primacy of the optical" in Adorno's phrase,<sup>15</sup> led to a series of articles on urban space, both interior and exterior, in the 1920s.<sup>16</sup> It also, of course, underlay Kracauer's life-long fascination with

12 "Die Bibel auf Deutsch," *Frankfurter Zeitung* (henceforth FZ) (April 27 and 28, 1926); reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse* (Frankfurt, 1963). Buber and Rosenzweig answered the attack in the FZ on May 18, 1926; their essay is reprinted in *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin, 1936), p. 276ff. Kracauer also attacked Zionism in a 1922 article entitled "Die Wartenden," reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*, p. 112.

13 *Die Entwicklung der Schmiedekunst in Berlin, Potsdam und einigen Städten der Mark vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Worms, 1915).

14 *Ginster*, *Von ihm selbst geschrieben* (Berlin, 1928); 2nd ed. *Ginster* (without final chapter), (Frankfurt, 1963); 3rd ed. (with final chapter), (Frankfurt, 1973), published as vol. VII of *Schriften* with his other novel, *Georg*.

15 Theodor W. Adorno, "Der wunderliche Realist," *Noten zur Literatur III* (Frankfurt, 1965), p. 87.

16 These have been collected as *Strassen in Berlin und anderswo* (Frankfurt, 1964).

the film, for which he is best known in the English-speaking world. In addition, the constructive impulse nurtured by his architectural experience reappeared in the technique Kracauer called "construction in the material," which he developed in the Weimar period, as well as in the highly structured way he organized his books and articles.

But for reasons that are not entirely clear, architecture failed to engage his total personality and he gave it up in 1920. Encouraged by the eminent philosophers Georg Simmel and Max Scheler, with whom he was personally acquainted, Kracauer turned to philosophical and sociological analysis as a new career. The first fruits of his shift were studies of Simmel, published only in part in 1920, and of sociology as a science, which appeared in 1922.<sup>17</sup> In both, the marks of Kracauer's interest in phenomenology as an antidote to neo-Kantianism were evident, but a phenomenology closer to Scheler's "material eidectics" than to Husserl's intuitionist search for essences beneath the flux of history. Central to Kracauer's vision of sociology was an anti-psychological, anti-subjectivist perspective. That is, he claimed that the attempt by the phenomenologists to counter psychologism in philosophy was appropriate to sociology as well. The reason for this parallel, Kracauer argued, could be found in the nature of his age. In characterizing it Kracauer explicitly borrowed from Georg Lukács' recently published *Theory of the Novel*,<sup>18</sup> specifically his distinction between meaningful, fulfilled periods of history and empty, barren ones. Like Lukács, Kracauer put his own era in the second category. A phenomenological sociology without psychological subjectivity was appropriate because the age was one in which meaning, community, and purpose were absent. The reality of the social world, he wrote, is a "bad infinity"<sup>19</sup> without a material totality. The integrated personality so valued by generations of German philosophers was also an ideological illusion. Idealism, with its implicit assumption of an immanently meaningful world, was thus a misleading metaphysics. The only alternative was a scientific sociology that would investigate the structural regularities of the de-individualized social realm without worrying about the need to integrate subject and object in a larger

"Georg Simmel," *Logos*, IX, 3, (1920); reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse; Soziologie als Wissenschaft. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Untersuchung* (Dresden, 1922); reprinted in vol. I of *Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1971).

18 George Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans* (Berlin, 1920), cited on page 13 of *Soziologie als Wissenschaft* (1971 ed.). Kracauer reviewed this book twice, in *Die Weltbühne*, XVII, 35 (Sept. 1, 1921) and *Neue Blätter für Kunst und Literatur*, IV, 1 (October 4, 1921).

19 *ibid.*, p. 29.



whole. Sociology, however, should not be expected to provide answers to the present cultural crisis, when the source was in society itself. Although Kracauer was soon to lose his enthusiasm for Scheler's materialist phenomenology, especially when Scheler began searching for eternal verities,<sup>20</sup> his underlying premise about the meaninglessness of the present period was a life-long conviction. Unlike Lukács, however, he never came to see a solution to the dilemma it presented.

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Although Kracauer was now seriously devoted to intellectual work, his speech defect and lack of advanced training in academic areas meant the impossibility of a university career. Following phenomenology's injunction to return to the *Lebenswelt* from the heights of philosophical speculation, and taking advantage of the increased prestige of journalism in the Weimar period, Kracauer took a position with the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1920. The *FZ*, founded in 1856 by Leopold Sonnemann, was one of the most prestigious of Germany's newspapers and a pillar of the democratic left-wing of bourgeois liberalism. Although its circulation after the war never exceeded 70,000, it retained a large measure of political and cultural influence among the middle-classes, especially the educated Jewish bourgeoisie from which Kracauer himself had come. It was, of course, not without its detractors. As a recent student of its history has written,

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler devoted more space and invective to the *FZ* than to any other newspaper, considering it the Gorgon of the *Judenpresse*, the sophisticated and highly effective organ of the Jewish world conspiracy, and an important contributor to Germany's defeat in the war.<sup>21</sup>

Although its liberal fervor began to slip by the late twenties, when its ownership changed hands, it continued to be a leading voice of middle-class opinion until the end of the Republic. Kracauer remained in its employ until 1933, when the Nazis decapitated "the Gorgon of the *Judenpresse*" with scarcely any resistance. He survived the purge of left-leaning staff after the change of owners because he was not directly

20 He attacked Scheler's turn to Catholicism in "Katholizismus und Relativismus," *FZ* (November 19, 1921); reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*.

21 Modris Eksteins, "The Frankfurter Zeitung: Mirror of Weimar Democracy," *Journal of Contemporary History*, VI, 4 (1971), p. 5. Kracauer himself wrote an article for Leopold Sonnemann for the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. XIV (1 October 1934).

concerned with political reporting. Kracauer was assigned instead to its *feuilleton* section, where the emphasis was on cultural affairs.

Throughout the Weimar period, Kracauer and his colleague Benno Reifenberg<sup>22</sup> made the *feuilleton* page of the *FZ* the most brilliant in the German-speaking world. Here he carried out an extensive and penetrating critique of everyday life, reminiscent of Simmel's, with the goal of stimulating his readers' critical faculties rather than merely diverting them. Among his more important substantive contributions was the systematic investigation of the cinema in social terms, which culminated in his widely read series "The Small Shopgirls Go to the Movies,"<sup>23</sup> written in 1927. Except for an isolated article by the Expressionist Kurt Pinthus in 1913,<sup>24</sup> Kracauer's pieces were the first in Germany to analyze the film from a social perspective. From a stylistic point of view, Kracauer's innovation was equally significant, reversing as it did one of the central weaknesses of the *feuilleton* as a genre. The *feuilleton* had its origins in the July Monarchy in Paris when advertising had expanded the market for newspapers by lowering prices.<sup>25</sup> It served as a lure for new subscribers by printing gossip, intrigues, and serialized novels. By the turn of the century, especially in Vienna where it reached its greatest popularity under Theodor Herzl in the *Neue Freie Presse*, the *feuilleton* had become an occasion for the self-indulgence of personal impressions. As a recent historian has observed, "the subjective response of the reporter or critic to an experience, his feeling-tone, acquired clear primacy over the matter of his discourse. To render a state of feeling became the mode of formulating a judgment. Accordingly, in the *feuilleton* writer's style, the adjectives engulfed the nouns, the personal tint virtually obliterated the contours of the object of discourse."<sup>26</sup> This was the style, it might be noted in passing, that had aroused the ire of that scourge of Viennese decadence Karl Kraus, who denounced its narcissism and duplicity.

22 Benno Reifenberg (1892-1970) was trained as an art historian. He joined the *FZ* in 1919 and became its *feuilleton* director in 1924. 1930-32, he was the head of its Paris bureau. After the war, he was a founder and leading writer for *Die Gegenwart*.

23 "Die kleinen Ladenmädchen gehen ins Kino," reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*.

24 Kurt Pinthus, "Quo Vadis—Kino?" cited in Karsten Witte's excellent *Nachwort* to Kracauer's *Kino* (Frankfurt, 1974), p. 266.

25 Walter Benjamin treated the early years of the *feuilleton* in Paris in his unfinished *Passagenarbeit*; see the selection in his *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London, 1973), pp. 27-34.

26 Carl Schorske, "Politics and the Psyche in fin-de-siècle Vienna; Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal," *American Historical Review*, CXVI, 4 (July, 1961), p. 935. For a more recent appraisal of the role of the *feuilleton* in Vienna, see Allen Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York, 1973).

Although there is no evidence of Kraus's scorn having had a direct effect on him, Kracauer filled the *feuilleton* page with pieces of a very different kind. Instead of drawing attention to his own quivering sensibility, he assumed a tone of ironic naiveté that allowed the material to speak for itself. Somewhat in the manner of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) style, which grew to prominence in Weimar's post-expressionist middle period, he maintained a cool, if clearly ironic, detachment towards his subject matter. From Simmel and the phenomenologists, he gained an attentiveness to the things themselves, which reinforced his architect's sensitivity to the visual world. But underlying his distance from the material he described was a subterranean fury at the irrationalities of Weimar life, which he saw embodied in such diverse phenomena as the waiting room of an employment office or the reception given to the Tiller girls, those "ornaments of the masses" whose precision-dancing reflected the disenchantment of the modern world.<sup>27</sup> Kracauer's attitude towards this trend was ambivalent; although he applauded its progressive, demythologizing side, he recognized the costs of social standardization and atomization. Moreover, as we shall see shortly, he identified many of its worst aspects with capitalism.

Throughout the twenties, Kracauer's reputation and influence steadily increased. For example, his advocacy in 1929 of the Soviet documentaries of Djiga Vertov and Esther Schub led to their popularity in Germany and ultimately in the USSR as well.<sup>28</sup> In retrospect, 1930 appears as the year of his greatest success. The *FZ* offered him the directorship of the cultural section of its Berlin office, and anxious to be at the center of Weimar life, he accepted. In the same year, his study of the harried lower-middle classes, which had been serialized in the *FZ* the year before, was published in book form to generally favorable reviews.<sup>29</sup> *Die Angestellten; Aus dem neuesten Deutschland* dealt with the more than 3,500,000 members of the recently enlarged white-collar sector of the working population, the group whose vulnerabilities the Nazis were to exploit with such moment. Caught between the inexorable rationalization of industrial production, which rendered their position

27 "Über Arbeitsnachweise," reprinted in *Strassen in Berlin und Anderswo*, and "Das Ornament der Masse," reprinted in the collection with the same title.

28 Asja Laci, *Revolutionär im Beruf*, p. 63. The crucial article was "Der Mann mit dem Kinoapparat," *FZ*, (May 19, 1929), reprinted in *Kino*.

29 *Die Angestellten. Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*, 1st and 2nd ed. (Frankfurt, 1930); 3rd ed. (Allensbach and Bonn, 1959), with an intro. by Erich Peter Neumann (Berlin, 1970); 5th ed. in vol. 1 of *Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1971), and as separate volume with review by Walter Benjamin appended.

precarious, and the fear of lowering their status through an identification with blue-collar proletarians, the *Angestellten* were fair game for political manipulation. Kracauer's most trenchant passages dealt with the weaknesses of the *Angestelltenkultur*, which made this manipulation possible. Here an earlier diatribe against the *Tat* circle's *ethisch* ideology gained new urgency because of the clear evidence of its widespread success. Protesting against the vulgar Marxist assumption that the unemployed *Angestellten* would soon join their working-class brethren, Kracauer pointed out that lacking an ideological faith, they were spiritually, as well as often materially homeless. The condition he had described in general terms in *Sociologie als Wissenschaft*, that Lukácsian "transcendental homelessness"<sup>30</sup> expressed in the modern novel, was now understood to be especially apparent in the lower-middle class, or new *Mittelstand*.

Apart from its substantive value, which helped inspire a widely read novel dealing with the same theme, Hans Fallada's *What Now, Little Man?*,<sup>31</sup> *Die Angestellten* broke new methodological ground. Based on qualitative evaluation and reconstruction of a number of interviews with Berlin white-collar workers, the book pioneered a technique the Lynds were developing in America at approximately the same time in their study of *Middletown*,<sup>32</sup> a technique known as participant observation. Kracauer made no pretense of polling the average mentality of the people whose values he was investigating. "Reality," he argued "is a construction,"<sup>33</sup> consisting of a mosaic of different observations. In a letter to Adorno, he spelled out the significance of his approach:

I consider the work methodologically very important insofar as it constitutes a new form of presentation, one which does not juggle between general theory and special practice, but presents its own special way of observation. It is, if you will, an example of materialist dialectics. Analogous cases are the analyses of situations by Marx and Lenin, which are excluded by Marxism as we know it today.<sup>34</sup>

One of the chapters in *Die Angestellten* is called "Asyl für Obdachlose," which echoes the phrase "transcendentale Obdachlosigkeit," a frequent refrain in *Die Theorie des Romans*.

Hans Fallada, *What Now, Little Man?*, trans. E. Sutton (London, 1933).

R.S. and H.M. Lynd, *Middletown . . . Contemporary American Culture* (London, 1929).

*Die Angestellten*, p. 216 in *Schriften* I.

Kracauer to Adorno, May 25, 1930.

Although difficult to emulate, Kracauer's method did produce a striking evocation of the *Angestellten* dilemma, which repays reading today, despite the large amount of subsequent work on the same subject.<sup>35</sup>

If 1930 saw Kracauer at the height of his public fame, it was also the year of perhaps his most important personal decision. On March 5th, at the age of 41, he ended his long bachelorhood and married Anna Elisabeth (Lili) Ehrenreich, then a librarian at the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt. Before his marriage, Kracauer's strongest personal attachment seems to have been a platonically erotic bond with Adorno, fourteen years his junior.<sup>36</sup> Lili Kracauer was almost 37 at the time of her marriage, born a Catholic in Strasbourg when it was part of the Second German Reich. She studied art history and philology in Strasbourg and Leipzig before the war and was beginning to study music at the Leipzig conservatory when the post-war inflation forced her to take the Institut job. From all indications it was an extraordinarily successful match with Lili Kracauer sharing her husband's intellectual interests and helping his work until her death in 1971. To Kracauer, she was "the greatest happiness of my existence."<sup>37</sup> They remained inseparable for thirty-six years, except for the short period when Kracauer was interned in France in 1940.

And yet, despite the personal and professional success Kracauer enjoyed in 1930, he still remained very much the "extra-territorial" intellectual. As already noted, spiritual homelessness was a theme which ran throughout his writings in the Weimar period, mocking the myth of the "Golden Twenties." When attempts were made to transcend the meaninglessness of modern life, whether religious in the case of Buber or Scheler, or political in the case of the *völkisch* Tat circle<sup>38</sup> or Lukács, Kracauer treated them with scorn. Similarly, the then current *Wissenschaftskrise*, that collapse of historicism into relativism which Troeltsch and Weber had confronted but not resolved, was impervious to correction through solely methodological means. Kracauer reasoned:

Not from science itself or with the help of philosophical speculation

35 See the bibliography in Fritz Croner, *Soziologie der Angestellten* (Cologne, 1962).

36 Leo Lowenthal has remarked on this aspect of the Adorno-Kracauer friendship. In a letter to Adorno on December 10, 1962, Kracauer speaks of "reawaking the Platonic eros" in connection with the writer Alexander Kluge. Before the war Kracauer's closest friend was Otto Heinebach, who was the model for the character named Otto in *Ginster*. He died in the fighting. (Letter from Lili Kracauer to Hans Helms, March 10, 1970).

37 Kracauer to Lowenthal, January 3, 1964.

38 "Aufruhr der Mittelschichten," *FZ*, (December 10 and 11, 1931); reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*.

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may the . . . crisis of science be resolved; its overcoming demands instead a real departure from the entire spiritual situation . . . Annihilation of relativistic thinking, blocking of vision against the infinite without bounds: that is all tied to a complete change in the entire essence of reality—and perhaps not only in it alone.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, what gave Kracauer much of his success in the Weimar period was his willingness to face the dilemmas besetting Germany without illusions. Success did not signify an end to his "extra-territoriality" so much as his ability to speak for others with similar situations.

No better expression of Kracauer's continuing personal estrangement can be found than *Ginster*, the semi-autobiographical novel he published without affixing his name in 1928. Although it would be hazardous to draw overly precise parallels between Kracauer and his main character, it is clear that he exploited many of his own experiences and attitudes in writing the novel. Set in the vacuous world of the petit-bourgeoisie, *Ginster* traces the attempts of one of its inhabitants to confront the idiocy of the first world war. Its hero, if the name is really applicable, is known simply by his nickname, Ginster, which means a type of shrub that grows by the side of railroad tracks. He is shown as a somewhat naive and passive victim of forces he cannot understand, although he musters the cunning to survive them. Trained, like his creator, as an architect, his uneventful and aimless life is interrupted by the war and the threat of conscription. He avoids the army for two years, but is finally drafted only to be released a few weeks later after starving himself into collapse. After he returns to civilian life, his existence resumes its meaningless ramble without Ginster having learned a great deal from his experience. His opposition to the war had been more moral than ideological at the start and remains so at the end. No *Bildungsroman*, *Ginster* is written in a restrained, bittersweet, laconic style that would place it as a product of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, if not for the frequent flashes of surrealistic energy that indicate Kracauer's impatience with pure objectivity. Ginster reacts, but when he does so it is without any real introspective growth. Unlike Kracauer himself, he fails to transcend the world of the architect to become a writer with the power to give his life at least aesthetic order. An aura of melancholy pervades the novel, although its final chapter, which was unaccountably dropped from the 1963 re-edition, can be read in a somewhat optimistic way.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> "Die Wissenschaftskrise," *FZ*, (March 8 and 22, 1923); reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*, p. 208.

<sup>40</sup> Helms has stressed this in his essay on Kracauer.



Kracauer manages, however, to maintain a consistently critical tension in the work by juxtaposing Ginster's obviously underplayed reactions and the horrors of bourgeois life and the war which demand a more vigorous response. Included among his targets is his uncle, who had died in 1924. Kracauer gently although pointedly satirizes him as an archivist incapable of connecting his fascination with the past to the problems of the present. In contrast to Ginster, his attitude towards the war is that of a superpatriot who would "give up his entire Middle Ages for the occupied piece of land and become the Fatherland in person."<sup>41</sup>

Although never achieving the notoriety of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Ginster ranks as one of Weimar's most effective fictional exposés of the insanity of the war and the society that spawned it. That Kracauer chose to publish it anonymously reveals much about the status of anti-war writing in the last years of the republic. Publically lauded by Thomas Mann, Joseph Roth, Hermann Kesten, and Hermann Hesse, Kracauer was proudest of the private praise he received from Alban Berg, whose letter of December 12, 1928 he cherished throughout his life. To Berg, *Ginster* was "not only a literary masterpiece, but also, in the truest sense of the word, a human document. . . . Something appears that always seems to me as the ideal condition of a work of art, which I have found only in the most infrequent cases." Many years later, Adorno would concur with this judgment, calling the book Kracauer's "most meaningful achievement."<sup>42</sup>

With all of the critical energies underlying Kracauer's work in the last half-decade of the Weimar period, it is not surprising that he was drawn into the orbit of the leftist opposition to the Republic. But here too, he remained an extra-territorial man, isolated from the dominant currents of radicalism. Judging from a biting satire of the post-war revolution in Osnabruck near the end of *Ginster*, Kracauer had not been caught up in the utopian climate of the early 1920s. And he consistently avoided any flirtation with the various parties of the left that survived those years. Nor did he regularly contribute to leftist publications, choosing instead to remain with the staunchly bourgeois *FZ*, even during its swing to the right. His attitude towards the Soviet experiment seems to have turned sour at an early point in its history. In short, he remained very much on the margins of Weimar left-wing life. As an intellectual, he had no illusions about his qualifications as a potential proletarian. In the introduction to *Die Angestellten*, he wrote: "The intellectuals are either

<sup>41</sup> *Ginster*, 2nd ed., p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Der wunderliche Realist," p. 98.

themselves employees or they are free, and then the employees are uninteresting to them because of their routineness (*Alltaglichkeit*). The radical intellectuals also do not easily come behind the exotica of the everyday."<sup>43</sup> Kracauer's hope in that work was to awaken the consciousness of intellectuals to the condition of the white collar workers. His target was the glib assumption of certain vulgar Marxists that this potentially dangerous stratum of society would join the working class. Just as he warned against the subsumption of the *Angestellten* under a simplified bipolar class rubric, Kracauer resisted the integration of the critical intellectual into any one movement or party.

This general stance was shared by the men who formed his closest friendships during the Weimar period: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, and Leo Lowenthal. Like Kracauer they were all unaffiliated and experimental leftists who could have merited Benjamin's description of Kracauer's "consistent outsidersness."<sup>44</sup> All were fascinated by cultural questions more than economic ones and had little patience with the mechanistic economism of the Second International orthodoxy. Kracauer was less interested in high art than Adorno or Lowenthal, less drawn to religious questions than Benjamin or Bloch, but he shared with them a common vocabulary and general outlook. As friends, they avidly read each other's work, often reviewing them with an appreciative, if not always uncritical eye.<sup>45</sup> On certain occasions, one would complain about the appearance of his ideas in the writings of another,<sup>46</sup> and in fact it is difficult to establish whose claim to

<sup>43</sup> *Die Angestellten*, p. 212 in *Schriften I*.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Politisierung der Intelligenz," reprinted in *Die Angestellten*, 5th ed. not in *Schriften*, p. 118.

<sup>45</sup> Among the reviews are the following: Kracauer review of Bloch's *Thomas Munzer als Theologe der Revolution* in *FZ* (August 2, 1922); Kracauer of Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* and *Einbahnstrasse* in *FZ* (July 15, 1928), reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*; Kracauer of Adorno's *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Aesthetischen*, written for *FZ*, but not printed because of the Nazi takeover; Bloch of Kracauer's *Die Angestellten* in *Nene Rundschau*, XLI, 12 (December, 1930) and in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt, 1962); Benjamin of Kracauer's *Die Angestellten* (see above footnote); Benjamin of Adorno's *Kierkegaard* in *Vossische Zeitung* (April 2, 1933); and Adorno of Kracauer's *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit* in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, VI, 3 (1937).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Benjamin's complaint to Gershom Scholem that many of the ideas in Kracauer's critique of the Buber-Rosenzweig translation of the bible were his. Letter to Scholem, March 29, 1926, in Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1966), p. 429. Many of the same ideas were later to play a prominent role in Adorno's attack on Heidegger in *Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Kurt Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston, Ill., 1973), as Adorno acknowledged in a letter to Kracauer (July 22, 1963).

originality in many cases. Stylistically, they were also relatively similar, although Bloch's Expressionist prose was all his own. The similarity rested in their frequent reliance on short, aphoristic evocations to make a philosophically laden point. Benjamin's *Einbahnstrasse*, Bloch's *Spuren*, and Adorno's *Minima Moralia* all bear comparison with Kracauer's *feuilleton* pieces in the *FZ*.

Where they perhaps most strikingly differed was in their attitude towards the revolution in Marxist theory signaled by the appearance of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* in 1923. Bloch and Adorno, although not entirely in agreement with the Hegelianized Marxism posited by those works, were far more favourable than Benjamin, Lowenthal or Kracauer. Kracauer's interest in Simmel and Scheler had reinforced his strong distrust of the idealism so prevalent in the neo-Kantian prewar period. In fact, his general attitude towards metaphysical speculation was such that Benjamin could call him an "enemy of philosophy"<sup>47</sup> in 1923. If he did have a philosophical interest in the early 1920s, it was in the work of the master anti-Hegelian, Søren Kierkegaard, whose impact is clear on Kracauer's ambitious investigation of the detective novel, which has only recently been published.<sup>48</sup>

Although Kracauer had endorsed Lukács' diagnosis of the meaninglessness of the modern world in *Theory of the Novel*, he was far less willing to accept the solution implicit in Lukács' conversion to Communism. An unpublished manuscript on "the Concept of Man in Marx," directed against Lukács, was lost during the emigration, but his argument has largely survived in a series of letters to Bloch during the mid-twenties. On May 27, 1926, he wrote:

It seems to me that[Lukács] has attacked empty and worn out idealism, but instead of transcending it, has fallen into it again. His concept of totality, if despairing of its own formality, has more similarity to Lask than Marx. Instead of penetrating Marx with realities, he returns to the Spirit (*Geist*) and metaphysics of exhausted idealism and allows the materialist categories to fall on the way. . . . Rudas and Deborin [the Soviet philosophers who attacked Lukács], however disgustingly shallow they may be, unconsciously are correct against Lukács in many things. . . . He is philosophically—a reactionary; please think of his concept of personality.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Adorno, "Der wunderliche Realist," p. 86.

<sup>48</sup> *Der Detektiv-Roman: Ein philosophischer Traktat in Schriften I* for references to Kierkegaard, see pp. 107-109.

After a return letter from Bloch, in which Lukács' materialist credentials were defended and the characterization of him as a reactionary was found wanting,<sup>49</sup> Kracauer replied on June 29th that

I spoke with [Korsch] in the Reichstag in January [1926] about Lukács. He approved of my arguments in general and explained that only out of very weighty tactical reasons did he intend to remain silent. . . . Through his reception of Hegel, Lukács covers the actual source of Marx's fundamental concepts in a fateful way. Marx comes, more decisively than Lukács presents and perhaps knows, from the French Enlightenment and, to be sure, from one branch of the Enlightenment that goes back to Locke and is represented by the names Helvetius and Holbach; that is, decisive categories of Marxism, such as the concept of "Man" or "Morality" can be understood only if one builds a tunnel under the massive mountain of Hegel to Marx and Helvetius. . . . Had Lukács seen clearer, it would have not been possible in the final chapter of his book, which dealt with organization, to introduce a bad concept of personality. . . . I would really like to know where, according to your conviction, Lukács' materialist intention can be placed. There is no room in the progress of this formal dialectic, which so smoothly leads to an empty totality. I can name many sentences in Marx which judge this dialectic. It means a regression behind Marx.

Although finishing with a positive appraisal of the brilliance of some of Lukács' passages on reification, Kracauer clearly rejected the basic burden of Lukács' argument. His distrust of totality, concern for the integrity of the individual personality, and adherence to the Enlightenment view of materialism informed all of his later work as well. In *Die Angestellten*, for example, he was to write of a "hunger for immediacy that without a doubt is the consequence of the undernourishment produced by German idealism."<sup>50</sup> Politically, his critique of *History and Class Consciousness*, especially of its advocacy of personal realization through submission to the will of the party, led in one direction: "I am in the last analysis," he wrote Bloch, "an anarchist, to be sure sceptical enough to consider anarchism as it exists as a distorter of its intentions."<sup>51</sup> As Lili Kracauer would acknowledge after her husband's death, all forms of conformity, including solidarity with

<sup>49</sup> Bloch to Kracauer, June 6, 1926. I am indebted to Karsten Witte for drawing my attention to the lost manuscript underlying the Lukács debate.

<sup>50</sup> *Die Angestellten*, p. 216.

<sup>51</sup> Kracauer to Bloch, June 29, 1926.



the working-class movement and its parties, were anathema to him.<sup>52</sup>

What is, however, also significant in this correspondence is Kracauer's appeal to Marx, as he interpreted him, against Lukács. His self-image as a defender of Marxism during the late Weimar period is apparent in an exchange he had with Bloch in 1932 after he published a critical review of Brecht's film *Kuhle Wampe*.<sup>53</sup> Bloch was outraged by the review and its placement in the bourgeois *FZ*; he claimed Kracauer had a personal bias against Brecht (which was true, as several of his letters reveal)<sup>54</sup> and argued that he had abandoned his militancy of only a short time before. There were no classless intellectuals, Bloch warned. Kracauer responded with equal indignation, arguing that whatever his personal feelings toward Brecht, he had never allowed them to interfere with his critical judgment. As for writing for the *FZ*, he remarked that his reputation as an "enemy of the bourgeoisie" was known to all and that writing in a non-Marxist paper gave his words greater public impact. The accusation that he had repudiated his militancy was also nonsense: "I have advocated Marxism visibly enough and more than others and will continue to advocate it in a way that corresponds to my talents and energies and with growing influence on the general development."

This view of Kracauer as militant was also expressed in Benjamin's review of *Die Angestellten*,<sup>55</sup> which Kracauer always praised. The book, Benjamin argued, was a "signpost on the road to the politicization of the intellectuals . . . . This indirect influence is the only one that a revolutionary writer from the bourgeoisie can have today. Direct effectiveness can only come from praxis." Kracauer was a "rag-picker" in the "dawn of a revolutionary day." The characterization of rag-picker was one Kracauer always liked,<sup>56</sup> but unlike Benjamin, his faith in the

52 Lili Kracauer to Hans G. Helms, June 19, 1970.

53 Bloch to Kracauer, April 29, 1931; Kracauer to Bloch, May 29, 1932. The review appeared in the *FZ* on April 5, 1932.

54 In a letter to Adorno, written on December 21, 1930, Kracauer wrote of a meeting with Brecht: "Once the conversation turned to theoretical matters, one had the feeling of talking with a school boy (*Obertertianer*). The craziest is that some people are taken in by this inverted Romanticism, whose brutality is possible only in a national socialist country. For Benjamin I have explanations, for others I don't." In a letter to Bloch on July 5, 1934, he made sarcastic remarks about Benjamin's trip to his "God" in Denmark (where Brecht was in exile) and said that Kafka would be astonished to learn that his work was so close to Brecht's and Communism (as Benjamin had asserted).

55 See fn. 44. Kracauer's appreciation is expressed in a letter to Erika Lorenz, October 22, 1961.

56 *ibid.*, 122. Benjamin did not choose the phrase "rag-picker" idly. It was a key concept in the understanding of nineteenth-century Paris and Baudelaire, who wrote a prose-poem about the figure. See Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, pp. 19-20, 79-80.

dawning of a revolutionary day soon wavered. In more recent years, the nature of his radicalism has been debated by Adorno and Hans G. Helms, the former concerned about a growing conformity in his work, the latter anxious to maintain its radical impetus as long as possible.<sup>57</sup> Although Adorno's perception has been borne out by Kracauer's most recent work, Helms has successfully drawn attention to the extent of Kracauer's radicalism during the Weimar period. The correspondence with Bloch quoted above, which could not be examined when Helms wrote, confirms his case. So too does a remark Kracauer's friend and colleague on the *FZ*, the Austrian novelist Joseph Roth made to Stefan Zweig in 1930; Kracauer, he wrote, "is one of those Jehovah-Jews, Marxism is his bible; the eastern Jews have a name for these people: God's policemen."<sup>58</sup>

For all his Marxist rhetoric and intentions, however, it is clear that Kracauer was more a member of Weimar's celebrated "homeless left" than any established Marxist movement. *Die Angestellten* candidly admits that "the work is a diagnosis and as such consciously refuses to make suggestions for improvements."<sup>59</sup> Although Kracauer ends the text with the ringing words: "It does not depend on the institutions being changed, it depends on men changing the institutions,"<sup>60</sup> how this is to be accomplished is never determined. Thus, one might say that despite his increasing celebrity during the waning Weimar years, he remained very much an extra-territorial figure in political terms.

In yet another way Kracauer remained an insecure and marginal intellectual. During the twenties, the lion's share of Kracauer's energies were spent in preparing his *feuilleton* columns, which were usually thrown out with the next day's trash. To a man of his philosophical and cultural ambitions, the ephemeral nature of his writings was a source of considerable chagrin, which he expressed in a letter to Adorno in 1930.<sup>61</sup> Other journalists such as Tucholsky and Ossietzky of the *Weltbühne* praised his work and tried to entice him into their circle, but he refused.<sup>62</sup> In later years, he would reject comparisons with them, just as

57 See fns. 2 and 15. Helms demonstrates how the recent publication history of Kracauer's works, especially the first German translation of *From Caligari to Hitler* and the second edition of *Ginster*, helped mute his earlier radicalism.

58 Joseph Roth, *Briefe, 1911-39*, ed. with intro. by Hermann Kesten, (Cologne and Berlin, 1970), p. 175.

59 *Die Angestellten*, p. 207.

60 *ibid.*, p. 304.

61 Kracauer to Adorno, July 22, 1930.

62 Letters from Tucholsky to Kracauer, March 4, 1927, and Ossietzky to Kracauer, July 7, 1929. Tucholsky, who lived in Paris, was very enthusiastic about Kracauer's descriptions of Parisian life. Ossietzky wrote positively about *Ginster*.

he would bristle at the label of journalist.<sup>63</sup> But without a proper academic connection, Kracauer was never really accepted in the scholarly world either. In the twenties, several manuscripts, including his highly speculative study of the detective novel, went unpublished because they fell between two stools. Philosophers were uninterested in his subject matter and readers of detective novels had no patience with his method.

Ultimately, however, Kracauer's fears were to prove unfounded as collections of his early work appeared in German.<sup>64</sup> And now thanks to the efforts of Siegfried Unseld of the Suhrkamp Verlag and Karsten Witte, who is preparing a major biography of Kracauer, his collected works are in the process of being published. Included in the seven volume series is Kracauer's second novel, *Georg*, written in 1934 but prevented from publication because of Kracauer's emigration from Germany. A social critique of the waning years of the Republic centering around a newspaper editor, *Georg* was warmly praised by no less a figure than Thomas Mann while still in manuscript,<sup>65</sup> but attempts to place it with a Dutch publishing house were unsuccessful. Unlike some of his other manuscripts, however, it survived his sudden departure from Germany in March of 1933, after the burning of the Reichstag and shortly before some of Kracauer's own books were burned in the famous conflagration of May 10th.

Kracauer was already in Paris when a letter came from the Frankfurter-Societats-Druckerei on August 25th informing him that his tenure with the *FZ* was at an end. The pretext was an article he had written for the left-wing *Das Neue Tage-buch*,<sup>66</sup> but it is clear that Kracauer had no place in the *FZ*'s future, which reached its nadir in 1939, when Max Amann presented it to Hitler as a birthday present. Still, Kracauer did not relish the exile that awaited him; in September, Benjamin reported to Brecht that he was still very depressed by the change.<sup>67</sup> From a position of power and prestige, he was reduced to freelance writing in a hostile environment. In his last work on history, when much of the pain had passed, Kracauer remarked on the condition of the emigré, who was like a palimpsest composed of different cultural

63 Kracauer to Erika Lorenz, March 31, 1962.

64 See fns. 12 and 16.

65 On December 8, 1934, Mann wrote to Kracauer that "the high literary qualities of your grand picture of society have not failed to make their impression on me." See Karsten Witte, *Nachwort to Schriften*, VII, p. 505.

66 The article, a review of an American film, was called "The Charlatan as President." It has been reprinted in *Kino*, pp. 221-3.

67 Benjamin, *Briefe*, vol. II, p. 6;2.

superimpositions. Here the ambivalence of his attitude towards extra-territoriality was clear:

As he settles elsewhere, all those loyalties, expectations, and aspirations that comprise so large a part of his being are automatically cut off from their roots. His life history is disrupted, his "natural" self relegated to the background of his mind . . . since the self he was continues to smolder beneath the person he is about to become, his identity is bound to be in a state of flux; and the odds are that he will never fully belong to the community to which he now in a way belongs . . . . Where then does he live? In the near-vacuum of extra-territoriality . . . . The exile's true mode of existence is that of a stranger.<sup>68</sup>

In Paris, Kracauer supported himself by writing film criticism and book reviews for Swiss newspapers such as the *Basler National-Zeitung* and the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and for French journals like the *Revue du Cinéma*, *Mercur de France*, *La Vie Intellectuelle*, and *Figaro*. *Ginster* was translated into French by Clara Malraux, at that time the wife of the novelist. Although gaining him a reputation in Parisien intellectual circles, the translation brought in very little income. Most of his efforts were directed towards the publication of a book that would help him stay above water. His subject was a German Jew of an earlier era who had also lived in exile, albeit voluntary, in Paris, Jacques Offenbach.

In 1937, *Jacques Offenbach and His Time* was published in German, French, and English editions.<sup>69</sup> Rather than the conventional life and works study, Kracauer attempted a "Social Biography" that paid as much attention to Second Empire Paris as to Offenbach himself. Continuing his interest in marginal cultural phenomena, he probed the world of the operetta and the related milieus of boulevard and journalistic society, where the deracinated modern man ruled supreme. The operetta, he argued, had "originated in an epoch in which social reality had been banished by the Emperor's orders;"<sup>70</sup> its phantasmagorical quality mirrored the illusory nature of Napoleon's reign, where class conflict was only apparently overcome. But for all its escapist tendencies, it fulfilled a critical function during the Empire's most repressive period: "At a time when the bourgeoisie were politically

68 Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (New York, 1969), p. 83.

69 Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit* (Amsterdam, 1937); 2nd ed. as *Pariser Leben. Jacques Offenbach und seine Zeit* (Munich, 1962); *Jacques Offenbach ou le secret du Second Empire*, with a preface by Daniel Halevy, (Paris, 1937); *Orpheus in Paris; Offenbach and the Paris of his Time*, trans. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (London, 1939). The English edition dropped Kracauer's foreword without explanation.

70 *Orpheus in Paris*, p. 289.

stagnant and the Left was impotent, Offenbach's operettas had been the most definite form of revolutionary protest."<sup>71</sup>

Although a massively researched and fluidly written study, which successfully conveys the flavor of the period it examined, *Offenbach* was a less penetrating work than Walter Benjamin's *Passagenarbeit*, the unfinished project that dealt with much the same subject matter.<sup>72</sup> It lacked Benjamin's conceptual daring and breadth of vision and broke no new ground in probing the commodity form in bourgeois society, as had the *Passagenarbeit*. Although clearly indebted to Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, *Offenbach* was no real landmark in Marxist cultural criticism, as Benjamin's work has come to be seen. Perhaps its greatest weakness, as Adorno predictably pointed out in a mixed review,<sup>73</sup> was its failure to deal directly with Offenbach's music, focusing instead on the libretti of Halévy and the general atmosphere surrounding the operetta world. Among Kracauer's major works, it is perhaps the least likely to justify our current interest in him.

Although the appearance of *Offenbach* lessened his financial burden somewhat, it was clear by 1938 that continued life in Paris was intolerable. With the growing threat of war and the lack of real opportunities to get a foothold in French society, emigration to America seemed the only solution. Although certain friends, such as Benjamin and Joseph Roth, remained in Paris, others, including Bloch, Adorno, and Lowenthal, were already in America or about to depart. The next three years were spent in a grim and frantic struggle to obtain the proper papers for the emigration. Reading his correspondence of those years is a painful experience, revealing as it does the desperation that Kracauer and doubtless many others felt in their desire to leave. In the light of his later disdain for filming historical dramas, it is a mark of his plight that on April 5, 1939, he wrote to the Hollywood producer Max Leammle to ask about the possibility of filming his *Offenbach*.

In 1939, some aid was given by the American Guild for German Cultural Freedom, but only for three months. Kracauer's best hope at that time was the Institut für Sozialforschung, which had resettled in New York in 1934. In 1937-8, he had worked on a commissioned study of "Totalitarian Propaganda: A Political Treatise" for the Institut's *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, but Adorno's editorial emendations were of such magnitude that he withdrew it in disgust. Nonetheless, Kracauer continued to hope that his friendships with Lowenthal and

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> See fn. 25.

<sup>73</sup> See fn. 45.

Adorno would lead to Institut support, even though he had never had very cordial relations with Max Horkheimer, the Institut's director. In the late thirties, however, the Institut suffered serious financial reversals that severely curtailed its ability to help other refugees. Still, Kracauer maintained his hopes even as he sailed for America and his disappointment was proportionately keen.<sup>74</sup>

Institut members, in particular Leo Lowenthal, were instrumental, however, in obtaining the necessary affidavits which allowed Kracauer to emigrate. Also helpful in this regard were Meyer Schapiro, the distinguished art historian, Iris Barry of the Museum of Modern Art's Film Library, and Varian Fry, who helped secure his release from the Centre de Rassemblement into which he had been put at the war's outbreak. In March of 1941, he left Paris for Lisbon and then on April 5th, he and his wife set sail for New York on the Niassa; they arrived ten days later. His state of mind at this time can be seen in the letters he continued to send to Institut figures for help. To Adorno, he wrote that his time in Paris had been "eight years of an existence that doesn't deserve that name. I have grown older, also inside me. Now is the last station, the last chance that I don't dare misplay or else everything is lost."<sup>75</sup> To Friedrich Pollock, the Institut's Associate Director, he wrote of his anxiety, "anxiety at beginning with nothing that I can call my own and perhaps without a chance at the start."<sup>76</sup> Kracauer's situation was certainly not enviable, but at least, unlike Walter Benjamin and many others, he was alive to try to make a new start in America. At the age of 52, Kracauer still had his most influential work ahead of him.

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Although disappointed by the Institut, Kracauer was fortunate to have found a sponsor with the Museum of Modern Art, where Alfred Barr and Iris Barry were making the serious study of film respectable. In subsequent years, grants from the Rockefeller, Guggenheim, Bollingen, and Mellon Foundations made his financial survival possible. Lili Kracauer continued to do research for her husband, but also worked for the Central Location Index, which helped in the search for displaced persons in Europe. Their combined income, in addition to a compensatory stipend paid by the German government in the 1950s, prevented a repetition of the last years in Paris.

<sup>74</sup> Conversation with Henry Pachter, New York, September 4, 1973; Pachter was on the same ship as Kracauer.

<sup>75</sup> Kracauer to Adorno, March 28, 1941.

<sup>76</sup> Kracauer to Pollock, March 28, 1941.



Kracauer's first project with the Museum was a study of Nazi war propaganda. Bernard Karpel, the Museum's Film Librarian, remembers him camped in the projection room watching films over and over again, smoking foul cigars, and bemoaning his diminished status.<sup>77</sup> The result was "Propaganda and the Nazi War Film," published in 1942.<sup>78</sup> Analysing both the form and content of the Nazi films, with a long and penetrating look at Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, Kracauer came to a conclusion about the contrived nature of pseudo-documentaries that anticipated his later argument in *Theory of Film*: "Most films of fact affect audiences not so much through the organization of their material as through the material itself . . . . The two Nazi campaign films differ from them in that they not only excel in solid composition of their elements, but also exploit all propagandistic effects which may be produced by the very structure."<sup>79</sup> Kracauer was especially interested in the Nazis' perverse use of the montage techniques developed by the Russian directors of the 1920s to a fine art. Another argument foreshadowing his later position concerned the relative absence of anti-Jewish activities in the films he viewed, which suggested the Nazis feared a reaction produced by the direct presentation of their atrocities; "The image," he wrote, "seems to be the last refuge of violated human dignity."<sup>80</sup>

For the next five years, Kracauer was occupied with the first book that brought his name to prominence in the American film world, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. In 1932, Kracauer had defined the task of the film critic in politically charged terms:

The film in the capitalist economy is a commodity like other commodities. Apart from a few outsiders, they are produced not in the interest of art or the enlightenment of the masses, but for the sake of the profits they promise to yield . . . . They exercise extraordinarily important social functions that no film critic, who earns the name, can leave unobserved.<sup>81</sup>

"The film," he wrote six years earlier, "is the mirror of the existing society."<sup>82</sup> These presuppositions still underlay *From Caligari to Hitler*, despite its subtitle's stress on psychology; for Kracauer, the psychic

77 Conversation with Bernard Karpel, New York, September 7, 1973.

78 Appended to *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1947).

79 *ibid.*, p. 289.

80 *ibid.*, p. 305.

81 "Über die Aufgabe des Filmkritikers," *FZ* (May 23, 1932); reprinted in *Kino*, ed. Karsten Witte (Frankfurt, 1974), p. 9.

82 "Die kleinen Ladenmadchen gehen ins Kino," in *Das Ornament der Masse*, p. 279.

states worth probing were "those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension of consciousness."<sup>83</sup>

To uncover this subconscious dimension of the collective psyche, Kracauer qualitatively analyzed hundreds of German films, whose immanent development he tried to link to the changing fortunes of the Weimar Republic. Qualitative analysis of German cultural phenomena was in fact a popular occupation in the America of the 1940s, and Kracauer was in the company of other emigré scholars like Ernst Kris.<sup>84</sup> While paying some attention to technical development such as the increasing use of studio interiors and new lighting techniques, Kracauer focused primarily on plots and significant motifs. His basic conclusion was that the cinema mirrored the shifts in the Republic's history with extraordinary fidelity. Among his most notable discussions was a critique of the Expressionist classic, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which revealed for the first time the reversal of its originally radical script by the director, Robert Wiene. No less significant was his devastating attack on Fritz Lang, then in Hollywood, in whose films Kracauer saw many of the marks of protofascism. Even *The Testament of Dr. Marbuse*, which Goebbels banned in 1933, "betrays the power of Nazi spirit over minds insufficiently equipped to counter its peculiar fascination."<sup>85</sup> The result, so a later defender of Lang claimed, was unfortunate: "No one has done more damage to Lang's reputation . . . . Kracauer gives the impression of carrying on a personal feud."<sup>86</sup>

In general Kracauer's verdict on the German cinema was strongly negative. As in his *Offenbach* study, he found a parallel between a mystifying cultural phenomenon and the general prevalence of false consciousness. Even the films of the middle years of the Republic, the "stabilized era" dominated by the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, came under fire. Following a critical reference to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* in *Die Angestellten*,<sup>87</sup> which demonstrated a certain uneasiness about his own

83 *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 6. This position marked his approach as early as "Die kleinen Ladenmadchen gehen ins Kino," where he wrote: "the idiotic and unreal film fantasies are the *day dreams of society* . . ." (p. 280, italics in original).

84 Ernst Kris, *German Radio Propaganda* (New York, 1944). Kracauer's social psychological approach to fascist behaviour also links him to the work done by his friends at the Institute for Social Research that led to *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1950).

85 *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 250.

86 Eric Rohde, *Tower of Babel. Speculations on the Cinema* (London, 1966), p. 86.

87 *Die Angestellten*, p. 287. For a Marxist discussion of Kracauer's critique of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, see Helmut Lethen, *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* (Frankfurt, 1970), esp. pp. 102-5. He attacks Kracauer for remaining a "free-floating intellectual" despite himself. Kracauer's distrust of groups is in fact clearly evident as early as his 1922 essay "Die Gruppe als Ideenträger," reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*.

"hunger for immediacy," Kracauer argued that "New Objectivity marks a state of paralysis. Cynicism, resignation, disillusionment; these tendencies point to a mentality disinclined to commit itself in any direction."<sup>88</sup> Even G.W. Pabst, whose fidelity to the photographic essence of film Kracauer found laudable, undercut the critical implications of his film through a weakness for melodrama and desire to remain a neutral observer. Here, in other words, was a realistic cinema with problematic political implications, implications which Kracauer was to minimize when he wrote his next major film book. *From Caligari to Hitler* bitterly condemned the German people as a whole with little effort spent on determining which film appealed to which audience. "Irretrievably sunk into retrogression, the bulk of the German people could not help submitting to Hitler. Since Germany thus carried out what had been anticipated by her cinema from its very beginning, conspicuous screen characters now came true in life itself."<sup>89</sup>

As might be expected, the book stirred an enormous critical storm.<sup>90</sup> Its obvious leftist political slant was denounced in a vicious anti-communist review by Seymour Stern, which appeared in several places. Kracauer's method, especially his reliance on "collective soul" was attacked by Franklin Fearing, Hans Sahl, and Eric Bentley, who called the book a "refugee's revenge" in *The New York Times Book Review*. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. approved of Kracauer's conclusions, but argued "that the main trouble, of course, is that Dr. Kracauer knows in advance which dreams panned out." Others worried about the possibility of tracing a similar proto-fascist lineage in non-German cinema, a thought that continued to trouble Adorno as late as the 1960s, when he wrote that *King Kong* could be taken as an allegory of comparable regression in America.<sup>91</sup>

Kracauer was not, however, without his defenders. David T. Bazelon praised his method in *Commentary*: Iris Barry did the same from a not

<sup>88</sup> *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 165.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>90</sup> Among the reviews were Seymour Stern in the *Los Angeles Daily News* (May 10, 1947) and *The New Leader* (June 28, 1947); Eric Bentley in *The New York Times Book Review* (May 18, 1947); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in the *Nation* (July 26, 1947); Richard Griffith in *New Movies*, XXII, 4 (Summer, 1947); Franklin Fearing in *Hollywood Quarterly*, II, 4 (July, 1947); David T. Bazelon in *Commentary*, IV, 2 (August, 1947); Iris Barry in *The New Republic*, CXVI, 20 (May 19, 1947); Hans Sahl in *The Modern Review* (August, 1947); Herman G. Weinberg in *Sight and Sound* (Summer, 1947); Karl W. Hinckle in *Eric, A Review of General Semantics*, V, 2 (Winter, 1948); and L. M. Hanks, Jr. in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, VI, 2 (December, 1947). Robert Warshaw wrote a letter to *The New Leader* on August 9, 1947, defending Kracauer against Stern's attack.

<sup>91</sup> Adorno, "Der wunderliche Realist," p. 105.

totally disinterested point of view in *The New Republic*, and Richard Griffith called it "the best book on the movies I have ever read" in *New Movies*. Robert Warshaw was moved to answer Stern's Red-baiting attack in the *New Leader's* letter columns and Herman Weinberg did the same in *Sight and Sound*, where he called it "perhaps the greatest book on the film ever written." The controversy has yet to be stilled as the different appreciations of the book in recent works by Peter Gay, I.C. Jarvie, Dieter Prokop, David Stewart Hull, and Michael Schroter illustrate.<sup>92</sup> And devotees of a non-social interpretation of the Weimar cinema still continue to draw sustenance from Lotte H. Eisner's *The Haunted Screen*,<sup>93</sup> originally written in French five years after *From Caligari to Hitler*.

With some distance between us and the book's publication, it seems safe to say that Kracauer's method, as flawed as it surely was, did uncover some remarkable tendencies in the cultural life of the Weimar years that make the collapse of the Republic more plausible. If disputable on certain films and occasionally doctrinaire in tone, *From Caligari to Hitler* nevertheless represents a milestone in the application of a sociological-psychological approach to a mass medium that can scarcely resist it. Although Kracauer's own later work contained certain implicit criticisms of the book, which will be examined shortly, it still deservedly commands the attention of students of both film and fascism.

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Thirteen years passed before Kracauer's next major analysis of the film. In that period, he continued to write film criticism and book reviews, now for American journals like *Harper's*, *Theater Arts*, and *Partisan Review*. He also helped support the efforts of others connected to the film in his new capacity as consultant to the Guggenheim Foundation. Project proposals by Arthur Knight, Robert Warshaw, Shirley Clarke, Parker Tyler, Hans Richter, Gregory Markopolous and others all received Kracauer's endorsement.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Gay's *Weimar Culture* follows Kracauer's judgments closely, but David Stewart Hull's *Film in the Third Reich; A Study of the German Cinema, 1933-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), is far more critical, calling Kracauer's major thesis "preposterous." (p. 3). I.C. Jarvie, *Towards a Sociology of the Cinema* (London, 1970), and Dieter Prokop, *Materialien zur Theorie des Films, Aesthetik, Sociologie, Politik* (Munich, 1971) are equally hostile. For a detailed and wide-ranging defense of Kracauer, see Michael Schroter, *Über Siegfried Kracauers Filmtheorie - Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Angewandten Psychoanalyse*. (unpub. Diplomarbeit, Free University of Berlin, 1972).

<sup>93</sup> Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, trans. R. Greaves (London, 1969).

But financial considerations compelled Kracauer to direct his energies in less interesting areas. In 1950, Leo Lowenthal, then director of research at the Voice of America, offered his old friend a post as research analyst. Two years later, Kracauer began an association with Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research, founded by Paul Lazarsfeld and headed at the time by Charles Y. Glock. The fruit of these two connections was an empirical study of the thinking of recent refugees from eastern Europe, prepared in collaboration with Paul L. Berkman. Based on more than 300 interviews conducted in 1951-2 with exiles from Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, *Satellite Mentality* was published in 1956 under the auspices of the Bureau.<sup>94</sup> When first entering the Bureau, a stronghold of quantitative methods, Kracauer had published a paper defending the virtues of qualitative techniques.<sup>95</sup> *Satellite Mentality* was based on such a methodology, but it lacked the imaginative "construction in the material" that gave *Die Angestellten* its unique power. The conclusions reached by the authors, occasionally couched in Cold War rhetoric, were not very startling, and in later years Kracauer would regard the book somewhat as an embarrassment.<sup>96</sup>

During the 1950s, the Kracaers had the opportunity to make several trips to Europe for the first time since their departure in 1941. Old friends like Adorno and Bloch had already returned; others like Benno Reifenberg, who helped found and edit the postwar periodical *Die Gegenwart*, were involved in reestablishing the continuities of German culture severed by the Nazis. Although Kracauer was encouraged to join them, like the majority of emigrés to America, he chose to remain in his adopted land where life, however "extra-territorial," was preferable to starting anew in Germany. Unlike Adorno, whose disparagement of the undialectical qualities of English is well-known, Kracauer took to his new language with total acceptance. His repudiation of Adorno's position was in fact a sore point between them.<sup>97</sup> In the early forties, he insisted on writing only in English and engaged friends like Bernard Karpel of the Museum of Modern Art to help him. When the editorial corrections of his works in the new language were minor, he was

94 *Satellite Mentality: Political Attitudes and Propaganda Susceptibilities of New Communists in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia* (New York, 1956).

95 "The Challenge of Qualitative Content Analysis," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* XVI, 4 (Winter 1952-53).

96 Kracauer to Erika Lorenz, October 22, 1961.

97 Kracauer to Leo Lowenthal, October 26, 1955; Adorno, "Der wunderliche Realist," 100. For an implicit endorsement of Kracauer's position, see George Steiner's essay on Nabokov significantly entitled "Extraterritorial," in *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (London, 1972).

overjoyed, but he must have been equally chagrined when Pauline Kael belittled his English in a long critique of *Theory of Film* in 1962.<sup>98</sup>

If the Kracaers ever considered returning to Germany, their trips quickly disabused them of the notion. The Europeans, he wrote Lowenthal after a three month stay in 1956, "have lost the power of assimilating the new. Somehow it is suffocating over there."<sup>99</sup> "We would die if we had to live again in Germany for good," he wrote two years later; it is a country "frightening in its prosperity, politeness, sham depth, and complete formlessness."<sup>100</sup> And again in 1960: Germany "is no country but a place lying somewhere in a vacuum."<sup>101</sup> Kracauer enjoyed seeing old friends like the publisher Peter Suhrkamp, the Blochs, the Adornos, and the Malraux's, and welcomed meeting new ones like the philosopher Karl Heinz Haag; but now over sixty, he was hardly loathe to break once again with a relatively comfortable environment.

The environment became more comfortable still when the Bollingen and Chapelbrook Foundations and later the American Philosophical Society awarded him the grants to work on his long planned second book on the cinema. Once again the Museum of Modern Art put its film library and viewing room at his disposal; additional assistance came from Henri Langlois' Cinémathèque Française in Paris and the British Film Institute in London. In 1960, *Theory of Film; The Redemption of Physical Reality* was published by Oxford University Press.

The book represented the culmination of Kracauer's lifelong fascination with film, which began, so he recalled in his preface, as a child when he devoted his first critical effort to "Film as the Discoverer of the Marvels of Everyday Life." Issues treated in the book—the primacy of photography, the non-filmic nature of historical or artistic subject matter, the virtues of the documentary, to mention a few—had all been treated in earlier essays.<sup>102</sup> His stress on the "redemptive" power of film, which meant its ability to make us attend to realities that were usually ignored, echoed his earlier concern for the neglected regions of cultural life: detective novels, the operetta, urban landscapes, troops of

98 Pauline Kael, "Is There a Cure for Film Criticism? Or, Some Unhappy Thoughts on Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film; The Redemption of Physical Reality*," reprinted in *I Lost It at the Movies* (Boston, 1965), p. 260.

99 Kracauer to Leo Lowenthal, October 20, 1956. (Original in English).

100 Kracauer to Leo Lowenthal, August 16, 1958. (Original in English).

101 Kracauer to Leo Lowenthal, October 29, 1960.

102 "Die Photographie," FZ (October 28, 1927), reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*; "Der historische Film," *National-Zeitung Basel* (May 9, 1940), reprinted in *Kino*; "Abstrakter Film," FZ (March 13, 1928), reprinted in *Kino*.



dancing girls, popular biographies, and the like. His reliance on what he called a "material" rather than formal aesthetic continued his quasi-phenomenological concern for the *Lebenswelt*, which had informed his work as early as *Soziologie als Wissenschaft*. And the motif of extra-territoriality strongly underlay his interpretation of the film-maker's vision.

But what had disappeared in the years between *Caligari* and *Theory of Film* was Kracauer's earlier stress on the specifically social content of the reality film redeemed. In his 1927 essay on photography, Kracauer had discussed *inter alia* the function of illustrated newspapers as enemies of true consciousness through their meaningless juxtaposition of unrelated phenomena. In the same article, he developed the relationships between photography, the domination of nature, and capitalism that would be taken up by Benjamin and Adorno in later years. In his series on "The Small Shopgirls Go to the Movies," he probed the function of the film in the cultural desert of petit-bourgeois life. In his 1928 discussion of abstract films, he chastised Expressionism in the cinema for becoming "*Kunstgewerbe*"<sup>103</sup> (art commodities), not for being non-filmic. "The film," as we have already noted he said, "is the mirror of the existing society," not of physical reality *per se*. In fact, his entire critique of formalism, whether in sociological theory or daily life, was tied to a more basic attack on capitalist reification.<sup>104</sup> All of this was absent from *Theory of Film*. As Adorno and other radical critics were to complain,<sup>105</sup> redemption seemed to imply affirmation as well. Kracauer protested vehemently against this charge, but it was clear that the critical impetus of his previous work had been blunted. Although it would be mistaken to say it had disappeared entirely, the crucial absence of any analyses of capitalism meant an undeniable shift had occurred.

Within the world of film criticism as such, however, the issues *Theory of Film* provoked were very different.<sup>106</sup> The major impulse behind most

103 "Abstrakter Film," p. 47. Still, it would be erroneous to deny that Kracauer also criticised *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* for what Paul Rotha called its "studio constructivism," that is, a violation of film's inherently realistic character. (From *Caligari to Hitler*, p. 76.)

104 See, for example, his remarks on the relationship between the capitalist production process, the rationalization of the world, and the Tiller Girls precision dancing act in "Das Ornament der Masse," pp. 53-55.

105 Adorno to Kracauer, February 5, 1965; Kracauer responded on March 3, 1965, arguing that film did have an immanent development apart from its social function. For a vigorous defense of the essential unity of the two books, see Michael Schrotz's *Diplomarbeit*.

106 My discussion of the history of film criticism relies in large measure on V.F. Perkins' *Film as Film*; Understanding and Judging Movies (London, 1972) and André Tudor, *Theories of Film* (London, 1974).

serious film theory during the early years of the medium had been a desire to elevate movies into films, that is, to lift them from entertainment into an art form. Theoreticians like Rudolf Arnheim, who drew upon Gestaltist psychology for his argument, Paul Rotha, Vachel Lindsay, and even the Marxist Béla Balázs were all anxious to stress the disparity between the event photographed and the artistic end-product that was the film.<sup>107</sup> Directors like Georges Méliès and Abel Gance in France and Pudovkin and Eisenstein in the Soviet Union were equally interested in exploiting the artistic potential of film, although of course the Russians had an ultimately political purpose. Techniques, especially the creative use of editing known as montage and the expressive employment of camera angles to produce dramatic images, were given primary attention by these critics and directors. When sound was introduced, Arnheim and some of the others bemoaned its injurious effect on the artfulness of film; true cinematic language was visual, not verbal.

In opposition to this position, which gained sufficient prominence to be called the "orthodoxy" by one recent observer,<sup>108</sup> two voices were raised, those of André Bazin,<sup>109</sup> the major theoretician of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1940s and 1950s, and Siegfried Kracauer. Although neither ever acknowledged the existence of the other, it is clear with hindsight that they were fighting a common battle. Whereas the artistic theorists had chosen Méliès as their model, Bazin and Kracauer picked the Lumière brothers, whose documentary realism and rejection of illusory effects prefigured a very different cinematic tradition. What the Lumière brothers had called, in a frequently quoted phrase, "the ripple of the leaves," only the film could capture and preserve. Both Bazin and Kracauer agreed on the priority of *what* was photographed over *how* it was photographed and spliced together. "Photography and the camera," Bazin wrote in a phrase that Kracauer could have seconded, "are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism."<sup>110</sup> The artistic theoreticians' stress on montage and the expressive image were no more than misplaced fetishes. The great film comedians like Chaplin and Keaton, whose unimaginative use

107 Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957); Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now* (New York, 1950); Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York, 1970); and Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film* (London, 1952).

108 V.F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 11.

109 André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le Cinéma?*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1958, 1959, 1961, and 1962); English trans. of vols. I and II as *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967 and 1971).

110 André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* vol. I, p. 12.

of the camera had earned them bad marks from the "orthodox" establishment, were now admitted to the company of successful filmmakers. Conversely, previous heroes like Eisenstein suffered, rightly or wrongly,<sup>111</sup> a fall from grace because of their excessive formalism.

Although Bazin was not as extreme in his insistence on non-artistic realism as Kracauer—compare, for example, their attitudes towards mixed cinema—<sup>112</sup> together they helped reorient the critical discussion about cinema in a radical way. The wave of Italian neo-realist films in the forties and fifties seemed a confirmation of their position. In more recent years, the rise of *cinema vérité* provided yet another blow to the artistic orthodoxy of the medium's infancy. What perhaps served most to aid their cause was the very success of the orthodox campaign; by the time of the realistic counter reformation, movies had indeed become films, and it was no longer necessary to defend their artistic credentials.

Kracauer's version of the anti-orthodox position is, of course, what concerns us here. Most commentators have found it to be more vulnerable than Bazin's, partly because Kracauer lacked the Frenchman's remarkable feel for individual films, partly because *Theory of Film* was far more doctrinaire than anything that Bazin wrote. According to Rudolf Arnheim,<sup>113</sup> Kracauer was a dogged conversationalist, who would worry an idea until all of its implications had been exposed; the argument in *Theory of Film* shows the effects of this character trait. Its basic premise is that there exists in film, as in all media, an essential characteristic that sets it apart from all others. This characteristic, which is derived from a phenomenological probe into its nature, is more than a descriptive term; it has normative value as well and can be used to separate "cinematic" from "non-cinematic" films. According to Kracauer, what makes a film conform to this norm is its fidelity to the photograph, which captures its subject matter, its "raw material," in a realistic way. The opposite genre is painting, where a "formative" tendency holds sway and the artist's subjective intervention is paramount. Without banishing the film-maker's creative side entirely, Kracauer clearly believed that in the mix between realistic and formative tendencies, the former must be dominant. On a continuum between documentaries and cartoons, the truly "cinematic" is at the documentary end. But, to be fair to his position, a balance must be struck which admits both impulses, even if one is more heavily weighted than the other.

<sup>111</sup> Tudor argues that Eisenstein should not be seen as the high priest of formalism, although this has frequently been the case.

<sup>112</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, pp. 215-231; Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, pp. 76-124.

<sup>113</sup> See fn. 9.

In using the term "realism," however, Kracauer was anxious to avoid sounding like a positivist with a belief in the pristinely mimetic character of the photographic image. The photograph, he acknowledged at one point in his argument is not a mirror:

Photographs do not just copy nature but metamorphose it by transferring three-dimensional phenomena to the plane, severing their ties with the surroundings, and substituting black, gray, and white for the given color schemes. Yet if anything defies the idea of a mirror, it is not so much these unavoidable transformations—which may be discounted because in spite of them photographs still preserve the character of compulsory reproductions—as the way in which we take cognizance of visible reality.<sup>114</sup>

What is striking in this paragraph is the ease with which he dismisses the "unavoidable transformations" that had been at the heart of the artistic theoreticians' argument. The fact that photographs are "compulsory reproductions" is enough to justify his insistence that the objects of perception are preserved, indeed "redeemed" by the camera. Later in his argument, Kracauer goes so far as to forget his admission that photographs are not mimetic reproductions of the physical world: "Now of all the existing media the cinema alone holds up a mirror to nature. Hence our dependence on it for the reflection of happenings which would petrify us were we to encounter them in real life."<sup>115</sup> Unfortunately, he failed to draw the obvious distinction between realism and naturalism, which might have helped him out of this dilemma.

But what is equally important in this paragraph is Kracauer's shift at its end away from the object of perception to the subject, to "the way in which we take cognizance of visible reality." To Kracauer, the subjective vision necessarily entailed by photography is an alienated one. The selectivity exercised by the photographer is relatively passive in comparison with that of the painter; it is more empathetic than spontaneous. Significantly, Kracauer identifies this vision with a melancholic, elegiac reaction to the world:

Now melancholy as an inner disposition not only makes elegiac objects seem attractive but carries still another, more important implication: it favors self-estrangement, which on its part entails identification with all kinds of objects. The dejected individual is

<sup>114</sup> *Theory of Film*, p. 15.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, p. 305.

likely to lose himself in the incidental configurations of his environment, absorbing them with a disinterested intensity no longer determined by his previous preferences. His is a kind of receptivity which resembles Proust's photographer cast in the role of a stranger.<sup>116</sup>

Here we have all the elements of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, disillusioned estrangement and unflinching objectivity, reproduced in an aesthetic of film. But whereas in his earlier comments on the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Kracauer had shown some critical distance from its implications, here he succumbs to them entirely. The motif of extra-territoriality, which we have seen so evident in his life and much of his work, is transformed into a prescriptive norm by which the "cinematic" nature of films are to be judged.

Having postulated this normative realism, Kracauer then proceeded to spell out the "affinities" photography has for certain types of reality, which also draw upon his earlier attitudes. These affinities are for "unstaged reality," "the fortuitous," "endlessness," "the indeterminate" and "the flow of life."<sup>117</sup> All of these are clearly related to his lifelong concern for the flux of the *Lebenswelt*, which resists formalized categorization. The film "redeems" these aspects of reality, which it alone can capture and preserve. In the present age, this power of redemption is extremely important. In his epilogue, Kracauer stressed two characteristics of the age as crucial: "the declining hold of common beliefs on the mind and the steadily increasing prestige of science."<sup>118</sup> The former confronts us with a normative void; ideology (understood in the non-Marxist sense of a unifying belief system) is on the wane. The latter interferes with our capacity to experience the physical world directly without the filter of formal abstractions.

Films cannot help us by restoring the lost sense of community and meaning for "the cooling process is irreversible."<sup>119</sup> This is in fact the major reason, so Kracauer argued, that prevents films from being seen as works of art: "Art in film is reactionary because it symbolizes wholeness and thus pretends to the continued existence of beliefs which 'cover' physical reality in both senses of the word."<sup>120</sup> Tragedy is

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 60-74.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, p. 301. For a similar argument, see the 1926 essay "Kult der Zerstreuung" reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*, p. 315-16.

especially inappropriate to the cinema because it presupposes an ordered cosmos, which the film relentlessly denies.<sup>121</sup>

If film is worthless in helping us recapture our sense of a meaningful universe, it is nonetheless useful in overcoming the other tendency of the modern world, scientific over-abstractness. Films help reawaken our openness to the concrete by making us confront unpleasant realities. As a "materialistically" minded medium, it proceeds from "below" to "above."<sup>122</sup> (Here one hears a dim echo of his argument in the letter to Bloch in 1926 that Lukács had badly underestimated the influence of the Enlightenment materialists on Marx.) But anything beyond this "redemption of physical reality" was beyond the power of the film:

Béla Balázs's thesis that the cinema comes into its own only if it serves revolutionary ends is an untenable one as are the kindred views of those schools of thought, neorealist and otherwise, which postulate an intimate relationship between the medium and socialism or collectivism.<sup>123</sup>

Implicitly, this debunking of Balázs also contains a criticism of Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay "The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction,"<sup>124</sup> which followed Brecht in seeing a revolutionary potential in the mass distraction of the cinema. Although it may appear as if Kracauer was attributing to the film something akin to Brecht's celebrated *Verfremdungseffekt*, it is clear that he had no confidence in the cognitive and ultimately political benefits of this estrangement. Kracauer may have still been a "rag-pick," but the "revolutionary day" had clearly failed to dawn.

*Theory of Film* created even more of a critical furor than *From Caligari to Hitler*. Positive voices were not absent, among them Herbert Read's, and surprisingly, Rudolf Arnheim's.<sup>125</sup> A friend of Kracauer's since the 1940s who had helped him choose the subtitle of the book,<sup>126</sup> Arnheim generously acknowledged the place of both his and Kracauer's

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, p. 265-270.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, p. 309. Schröter makes the interesting point that the implications of Kracauer's film theory are anarchistic (p. 44). This jibes with Kracauer's self-description in his letter to Bloch of June 29, 1926, which Schröter could not have seen.

<sup>124</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. with intro. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968).

<sup>125</sup> Herbert Read in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 11, 2 (April, 1962); Rudolf Arnheim, in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 21 (1963); republished as "Melancholy Unshaped" in *Toward a Psychology of Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972).

<sup>126</sup> See fn. 9.



approaches in understanding the cinema. *Theory of Film*, he wrote, "is probably the most intelligent book ever written on film;"<sup>127</sup> although needing "correction and clarification," "the core of his thesis is surely valid and important."<sup>128</sup> Arnheim endorsed Kracauer's stress on the realistic tendency in the cinema, a remarkable reversal of his own *Film as Art*, but unlike Kracauer, he connected it to a cultural decline rather than a return to our senses: "a concern with unshaped matter is a melancholy surrender rather than the recovery of man's grip on reality. Perhaps, then, we are witnessing the last twitches of an exhausted civilization, whose rarefied concepts no longer reach the world of the senses."<sup>129</sup>

Most of the critical reception of *Theory of Film* was, however, essentially hostile. The least charitable of his accusers was Pauline Kael, who wrote a lengthy and vitriolic attack in *Sight and Sound* in 1962.<sup>130</sup> Miss Kael's ire was aroused by the very attempt to theorize about film in the grand manner:

What do movies [N.B. not "films"] have to do with the "redemption" of "physical reality"? Our physical reality—what we experience around us—is what we can't redeem: if it's good, marvelous; if it isn't, we can weep or booze, or try to change it. Redemption, like sublimation, is a dear sweet thought. And Kracauer's theory of film is a theory imposed on motion pictures.<sup>131</sup>

In elaborating her attack, she scored her most telling points in demonstrating the lengths to which Kracauer went to include cinematic phenomena he liked, such as Fred Astaire's dance routines, under the rubric of realism. She was somewhat less persuasive when hearing a German accent and noting a speculative mind, she compared Kracauer to Hegel, the philosopher he spent much of his adult life opposing.<sup>132</sup> Equally questionable was her call for movies to be "judged by the same kind of standards that are used in other arts,"<sup>133</sup> as if there was such a thing as "art" with one set of standards for all its subdivisions.

Other critical appraisals by Tyler, Linden, Engels, Jarvie, Perkins.

<sup>127</sup> Arnheim, "Melancholy Unshaped," p. 180.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>130</sup> See fn. 97.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*, p. 259.

and Tudor,<sup>134</sup> to mention the most prominent, were less bilious than Miss Kael's, but scarcely less disparaging. As a whole, the points they made, embellished by some of my own, are as follows:

1) The search for the essence of a medium (which Miss Kael called "the great lunatic tradition"<sup>135</sup>) is itself a highly questionable endeavor. There is no "nature" of film with prescriptive value by which good films can be separated from bad. Nor are there immanent laws of the cinema that can be abstracted from the social context in which films are made.

2) Film is particularly difficult to see in essentialist terms because the assumption that photography is its primary source is erroneous. One might equally stress the opposition between the static photograph and the dynamic motion picture. In a technical sense, such nineteenth-century phenomena as the magic lantern and other optical toys simulating motion are equally important. In a substantive sense, the traditions of the theater and the novel cannot be discounted. In short, Méliès as well as the Lumière brothers must be given his due.

3) The distinction Kracauer makes between reality and "camera reality," the latter taking into account the distortions that can not be overcome, is poorly developed and inconsistently used. Although anxious to avoid a positivist copy-theory of reality, he frequently sounds as if he believes films "mirrored" the material world. At times, Kracauer calls films cinematic solely because of the techniques used, a stress on movement, for example, rather than because of their content. He sometimes justifies illusions that are convincing to the audience because of their fidelity to "camera reality," but in what way do they then redeem the physical world? Once technique is admitted as a criterion of realism, then the emphasis is once again shifted away from the object photographed to the subjective photographer and Kracauer is back on "orthodox" grounds.

4) In establishing his prescriptive aesthetic, Kracauer has posited norms that are far too exclusive. Not only do they rule out cartoons, fantasies (such as those of Cocteau, one of Kracauer's *bêtes noires*), filmed operas and plays, almost all avant-garde films including expressionist classics like "Caligari," history films, and movies made from novels, but they also deny *a priori* the significance of the most widely admired directors of the post-neo-realist 1960s: Fellini,

<sup>134</sup> Parker Tyler, *Sex Psyche Etcetera in the Film* (New York, 1969); George W. Linden, *Reflections on the Screen* (Belmont, Cal., 1970; Gunther Engels, "In der Zwangsjacke der Theorie," *Saarbrücken Zeitung* (January 30/31, 1965); for Perkins and Tudor, see fn. 105.

<sup>135</sup> Pauline Kael, "Is There a Cure for Film Criticism?" p. 245.

Antonioni, Resnais, Buñuel, Godard, and Bergman.<sup>136</sup> Any theory of film that lacks the room for these types of movies is intrinsically inadequate.

5) Finally, the more general cultural tasks Kracauer sets the cinema are grounded in questionable assumptions. Is it true that all normative systems have been shipwrecked, or is Kracauer merely succumbing to the myth of the 1950s: the end of ideology? Moreover, even if one were to grant Kracauer's assumption about the impoverishment of our perceptual apparatus caused by scientific abstraction, can one then say that films really return us to the sensuous, non-reified flow of "life"? In fact, doesn't the very mediation of the film suggest an experience that is still passive and estranged? That melancholic alienation Kracauer sees as the essence of the camera eye is a poor candidate for the means to bring us back to our senses. Is there, in fact, any evidence that film-watching really leads to renewed participation in "life," rather than compensating for its absence? Indeed, the very notion of "life," which Kracauer once criticized in Simmel,<sup>137</sup> but now accepts wholeheartedly, is highly suspect. To identify the real solely with process and flux is itself a Romantic assumption of dubious merit, as even Arnheim in his favorable review noted.<sup>139</sup> Finally, the desire to redeem physical reality suggests a kind of indiscriminate yea-saying that fails to separate what needs to be saved from what doesn't. The implications of this are apparent in Kracauer's reaction to films that force us to see the monstrosities of the world:

The mirror reflections of horror are an end in themselves. As such they beckon the spectator to take them in and thus incorporate into his memory the real face of things too dreadful to be held in reality. In experiencing the rows of calves' heads or the litter of tortured human bodies in the films made of the Nazi concentration camps.

136 In *Theory of Film*, Kracauer does talk about some of Fellini's earlier films, especially *The Nights of Cabiria* and *La Strada*, but he sees them in the context of neo-realism. He also speaks highly of Buñuel, but it is the post-surrealist Buñuel of *Land Without Bread* and *Los Olvidados*. Bergman is mentioned only in passing, but Kracauer tries to save him for his thesis by saying that the "down-to-earth attitude" of certain characters in *The Seventh Seal* "in a measure acclimatize(s) the film to the medium" (p. 308). Resnais, Godard, and Antonioni had not yet made enough of a mark to be considered in the book. But we do know from his later correspondence that he considered Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* a pretentious bore. (Kracauer to Merve Ciment, May 23, 1965).

137 *Theory of Film*, p. 169-170.

138 "Die Wartenden," *FZ* (March 12, 1922); reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*, 108-9.

139 Arnheim, "Melancholy Unshaped," p. 183.

we redeem horror from its invisibility behind the veils of panic and imagination. And this experience is liberating in as much as it removes a most powerful taboo.<sup>140</sup>

What Kracauer fails to consider here is the extent to which films numb us to horror through over-exposure. The increasing tolerance for and even delight in graphic horror has been one of the most unsettling tendencies of the last decade. Removing taboos, especially if it entails the loss of our capacity for panic (or at least disgust) and imagination, may not always be liberating after all.

With the rough treatment it received at the hands of most commentators, *Theory of Film* marked the end rather than the beginning of an era in film criticism. It helped lay to rest the old debate over the artfulness of film, but in turn, its failures made the extreme realist position clearly untenable. Attempts to judge films as "cinematic" or not according to a prescriptive aesthetic soon seemed highly dubious. Instead, film criticism turned to the so-called "auteur theory," which emerged from the pages of the *Cahiers du Cinema* and was propagated in America by Andrew Sarris,<sup>141</sup> or it focused on the more modest task of investigating the nature of specific genres within the larger corpus of films. Most recently, a structuralist method has been applied to the language of film by Christian Metz in France and Peter Wollen in Britain.<sup>142</sup> *Theory of Film* remains a monument in the history of thinking about movies, but it also serves as a warning against building other monuments of its kind.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the 1960s, Kracauer's career took a relatively new turn. These last several years before his death appear to be among the happiest of his life. Within the academic world, he finally received a measure of the recognition that had eluded him previously; he became an associate member of the Seminar on Interpretation at Columbia University and was invited on several occasions to Germany for colloquia on poetry and hermeneutics at Cologne and Lindau. His early *FZ* writings were rediscovered by an appreciative German audience, which began to see his relationship to the more celebrated trio of Bloch, Benjamin, and

140 *Theory of Film*, p. 306.

141 Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," *Film Culture*, 27 (1962-63). Pauline Kael also ridiculed Sarris in "Circles and Squares, Joys and Sarris" in *I Lost It at the Movies*.

142 Christian Metz, *Langage et Cinema* (Paris, 1971); Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London, 1969).

Adorno. *Ginster* was republished in 1963 with its author's name affixed; the critical acclaim was almost universal. There was talk of a Kracauer renaissance<sup>143</sup> as some of his English works were translated into German for the first time. In Frankfurt, a student of Adorno's named Erika Lorenz prepared a *Diplomarbeit* on his career, which would have been expanded into a doctoral dissertation if not for her return to East Germany for personal reasons.<sup>144</sup> Although Kracauer was not completely won over by her interpretation—he objected to her attempt to assimilate him to the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory and to her calling him a journalist—he glowed in the recognition that such a project signified.

In 1964, Adorno himself wrote a piece on Kracauer for his 75th birthday, entitled "The Whimsical Realist."<sup>145</sup> Although initially flattered, Kracauer's opinion changed drastically when he read between the lines to see a number of implied criticisms. In a series of heated letters, he defended himself and struck back at Adorno. Although it would be impossible here to detail the issues between them, which I hope to do elsewhere at a later date, suffice it to say that their friendship of over forty years was severely strained by Adorno's "tribute."

Kracauer's increased concern for his place in history was matched by a new fascination with the philosophy of history itself. After a long period of wandering, he returned, at least intellectually, to his boyhood home with his uncle Isidor. From the completion of *Theory of Film* until his death, he worked with almost total absorption in an area he had never really explored with any rigor before. Although losing valuable time in preparing the German translation of the film book, Kracauer completed the lion's share of his manuscript by the time of his relatively sudden death from pneumonia in November, 1966. His architect's habit of constructing the manuscript in meticulous fashion before writing the final draft made its posthumous publication possible. In 1969, *History: The Last Things Before the Last* was brought out by Oxford University Press, but not without serious difficulties in the interim.

Sheldon Meyer of OUP had wanted Lili Kracauer to edit and organize her husband's manuscript, but lacking the self-confidence, she refused. Instead, a former acquaintance of Kracauer's, a German living in New York named Reinhard Koehne, was hired to put the book in order. The decision proved an unhappy one as Koehne and Lili

143 Helmut Günther, review of *Ginster* in *Welt und Wort*, 3 (1964).

144 Enka Lorenz, *Siegfried Kracauer als Soziologe* (Diplomarbeit, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt, 1962). Adorno informed Kracauer of her decision to leave West Germany in a letter of January 10, 1964.

145 See fn. 15.

Kracauer quickly developed a mutual distrust; her fidelity to the letter of Kracauer's drafts was not shared by Koehne, who finally withdrew in anger. A law suit followed but was ultimately dropped, and the book was eventually published without any mention of Koehne's name. A very generous foreword was provided by Paul Oskar Kristeller, the distinguished historian of Renaissance philosophy with whom Kracauer had become close during his final years.

If *History* was ill-starred in its preparation, its fate after publication was scarcely more fortunate. The pre-publication review by the Virginia Kirkus Service was unsympathetic, and despite a very positive reaction by Georg Iggers in the *American Historical Review*, the book sank with scarcely a ripple.<sup>146</sup> By the early 1970s, it was remaindered and taken out of circulation. Kracauer was widely known in the film world, but he was neither a professional philosopher nor a historian and thus lacked a real constituency in those fields. The private expressions of enthusiasm by such celebrated historians as J. J. Hexter and Werner Kaegi were of little help.<sup>147</sup> Kracauer had had extraordinarily high expectations for what he considered his master work, but these were to be disappointed, at least in the short run.

And yet, in many ways, *History* is one of Kracauer's most compelling and original works, which deserves to be "redeemed," if one may borrow his own word, from an unmerited oblivion. In concluding this appreciation of Kracauer's career, it would be useful to linger a while with his final book, not merely because it has been denied the critical examination it deserves, but also because it ties together many of the themes of his previous work. Without an understanding of the perspective expressed in *History*, Kracauer's varied interests and conflicting approaches make little coherent sense. With that understanding, they begin to knit together.

In the book itself, he makes some astute observations about Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, which raise crucial questions about Kracauer himself. Discussing Proust's attempt to reconcile the

146 The unsigned Kirkus review of February 15, 1969, called the book "passé and muddled," ill-informed on contemporary writings in the philosophy of history, and in need of "a dose of analytic rigor." Iggers' review was in the *American Historical Review*, LXXV, 3 (February, 1970); he called the book "a real gem," although he took issue with its interpretation of Marc Bloch.

147 J. H. Hexter to Sheldon Meyer, April 26, 1967; Werner Kaegi's praise was quoted in a letter from Lili Kracauer to Sheldon Meyer, December 11, 1969. Other letters favorable to Kracauer's essay on "Time and History" came from Karl Lowith (January 20, 1964), H. I. Marrou (April 20, 1964), Arnold Hauser (February 2, 1964), and Erwin Panofsky (March 16, 1964).



antinomy between objective, chronological time and subjective, recapturable time, he remarks:

the story of his (or Marcel's) fragmentized life must have reached its terminus before it can reveal itself to him as a unified process. And the reconciliation he effects between the antithetic propositions at stake—his denial of the flow of time and his (belated) endorsement of it—hinge on his retreat into a dimension of art. But nothing of the sort applies to history. Neither has history an end or is it amenable to aesthetic redemption.<sup>148</sup>

Before Proust, Dilthey had also argued that meaning was only perceivable at the end of a life, when its constituent moments could be seen as parts in a completed whole:

One would have to wait for the end of a life and, in the hour of death, survey the whole to ascertain the relation between the whole and its parts. One would have to wait for the end of history to have all the material necessary to determine its meaning.<sup>149</sup>

But unlike Proust, Dilthey did not believe that an artificial, premature end could be achieved through an aesthetic recapitulation of a life still in progress, even though one might withdraw into a cork-lined room to prevent the future from having any meaning. Kracauer clearly shared Dilthey's qualms about this solution, as he did his argument about full meaning coming at the end of history, an end that would never come. Where it seems to me he was somewhat ambivalent was in his attitude towards the closure of an individual life signified by death. That desperate insistence on chronological anonymity we have noted before can be read not merely in a psychological sense; it also suggests a desire to thwart the attribution of final meaning to his life which would follow its end. Kracauer was both driven by the need to order his life retrospectively, which was perhaps responsible for his early semi-autobiographical novels, and repelled by the thought that this meant the exhaustion of its open-ended potential. This ambivalence clearly paralleled his attitude towards extra-territoriality, which we have noted earlier.

148 *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, p. 163. Proust's work also played a crucial role in *Theory of Film*; Michael Schröter has a number of illuminating observations on its significance. (p. 59f).

149 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society*, ed. with intro. by H. P. Rickman (New York, 1961), p. 106.

The question then that must be asked is whether or not his death does give us an insight into the whole meaning of his life. In other words, do we now have a vantage point like the spire of Proust's Combray Church from which the landscape before us (or more correctly, behind us) becomes coherent? Failing this, can we say that *History: The Last Things Before the Last* provides a substitute reconciliation, very much like Marcel's "retreat into the dimensions of art," which was the only redemption Kracauer himself could achieve?

To answer the first part of the question, there is little in Kracauer's biography to suggest that the extra-territoriality that marked it from an early age was ever really overcome. Although Adorno worried that his friend had decided to seek "happiness"<sup>150</sup> after emigrating to America, thus becoming a conformist of sorts, Lili Kracauer's word that her husband had resisted conformity to the end must be given at least equal weight.<sup>151</sup> Despite his continuing marginality, however, there is little to indicate that Kracauer fashioned his life in such a way that made non-conformity itself a positive life-style. There is no hint of a Rimbaud or Jarry here, seeking to make his life into an artistic whole through the acting out of an alternative vision. Nor is there any suggestion of a Lukács or T. S. Eliot, finding wholeness in obedience to an external authority. Kracauer remained an outsider to the end, sceptical of all belief systems, false reconciliations, and communitarian solutions to alienation. As the economist Adolph Lowe, who spoke at his funeral, remarked: "I remember him wearing the mask he liked best: as Sancho Panza trotting on his ass behind the frantic visionaries in his *'bunte Nuchternheit'* [gay, many-colored sobriety] as his friend Ernst Bloch so well defined him."<sup>152</sup> In short, aside from whatever personal vision may have been granted him "in the hour of death," it is impossible for the historian to say that Kracauer's life achieved any really unified meaning at its end. Indeed, as Kracauer himself recognized in his discussion of Proust, personal histories cannot be set apart from the larger context of historical change, which admits of no real redemption.

What, then of *History: The Last Things Before the Last*? Does it function the way Marcel's novel did to render his life a whole through a surrogate aesthetic (or in this case, intellectual) reconciliation? Does it succeed where earlier fictional attempts like *Ginster* and *Georg* were only partially successful largely because of their prematurity? The answer, it seems to me, is a guarded yes, even though Kracauer's

<sup>150</sup> Adorno, "Der wunderliche Realist," p. 100. This accusation infuriated Kracauer.

<sup>151</sup> Lili Kracauer to Hans G. Helms, June 19, 1970.

<sup>152</sup> Adolph Lowe, "Thoughts on Siegfried Kracauer," delivered at his funeral in New York, November 27, 1966, now in the *Nachlass*.

substantive argument throughout is directed against reconciliation. At first glance, the book seems an improbable candidate for this task. Less than a month before his death, in his last letter to Leo Lowenthal, he wrote: "I am not yet out of the tunnel, but in the distance there is already something like a dim light."<sup>153</sup> His final illness prevented him from reaching the light in its full brightness, but even if he had lived to complete the book, its final form would not have suggested wholeness. As he planned it *History* was to appear, as a series of relatively autonomous meditations on aspects of history and historical craftsmanship.<sup>154</sup> It is not a sustained and rigorously developed argument, and indeed, many of its conclusions are directed against reconciliation. And yet, paradoxically, it does have certain unifying themes and more importantly from our point of view, it resurrects all of the major concerns of his previous work, casting them in a new and revealing light.

Shortly after starting the work, Kracauer wrote to Lowenthal that he had suddenly realized that the new book "is a direct continuation of my theory of film: the historian has traits of the photographer, and historical reality resembles camera-reality. The similarities are really startling; I had gone on this route complete unconsciously."<sup>155</sup> He then asked Erika Lorenz to compile a list of his early essays in which history played a role. She wrote back that she had found six: "Die Wissenschaftskrise," "Der verbotene Blick," "Die Reise und die Tanz," "Das Ornament der Masse," "Zu den Schriften Walter Benjamins," and perhaps most importantly, "Die Photographie," the first time in which Kracauer explored the link between history and photography.<sup>156</sup> In his introduction to *History*, which he completed in February, 1962, he spelled out the connections revealed when he saw the link between the film book and his current interest: *Theory of Film*

now appears to me in its true light: as another attempt of mine to bring out the significance of areas whose claim to be acknowledged in their own right has not yet been recognized. I say "another attempt" because this was what I had tried to do throughout my

<sup>153</sup> Kracauer to Leo Lowenthal, October 29, 1966.

<sup>154</sup> The chapters are as follows: "Nature," "The Historical Approach," "Present Interest: The Historian's Journey," "The Structure of the Historical Universe," "Ahasuerus or the Riddle of Time," "General History and the Aesthetic Approach," and "The Anteroom."

<sup>155</sup> Kracauer to Leo Lowenthal, February 16, 1961.

<sup>156</sup> All of these are collected in *Das Ornament der Masse*, with the exception of "Der verbotene Blick," which appeared in the *FZ* (April 9, 1925) and is reprinted in *Struktur in Berlin und anderswo*. (Letter from Erika Lorenz to Kracauer, February 2, 1962.)

life—in *Die Angestellten*, perhaps in *Ginster*, and certainly in the *Offenbach*. So at long last all my main efforts, so incoherent on the surface, fall into line—they have all been served and continue to serve, a single purpose: the rehabilitation of objectives and modes of being which still lack a name and hence are overlooked or misjudged. Perhaps this is less true of history than photography; yet history too marks a bent of the mind and defines a region of reality which despite all that has been written about them are still largely *terra incognita*.<sup>157</sup>

The analogy between history and photography turned out to be a central prop of his argument, and not merely because of their shared redemptive role, to which I will return shortly. They resemble each other in a number of ways. Both are "a means of alienation,"<sup>158</sup> which for reasons he never fully developed is a healthy condition to foster in the modern world. Both investigate and reveal the realities of the *Lebenswelt* in all its contingent, indeterminate open-endedness. Both are produced by a balance between "realistic" and formative" tendencies, with an emphasis on the former. Both underwent a period when simple mimesis was assumed to be its special genius (the positivist historicism associated with Ranke's *wie es eigentlich gewesen* and the early years of nineteenth-century daguerreotypy). Although this period was marked by naïveté, both are still more heavily weighted on the realistic side, which separates history from historical fiction as it does film from painting. Both use close-ups and establishing shots, which in the historians' vocabulary are known as microhistory and macrohistory. Finally, both are "anteroom areas," which elude over-systematization, ultimate answers, and the holistic shaping of art.

In drawing these parallels, Kracauer exhibited a far lighter touch than in *Theory of Film*. Whereas in the earlier book, overly artistic films were banished as "uncinematic," historical writing that fell on the formative side of the scale was now admitted as legitimate. In dealing with the structure of the historical universe, Kracauer arrived at a conclusion that had eluded him in his analysis of the film universe: that its structure was "non-homogeneous." Although suspicious of overly ambitious attempts to discern secular or cyclical patterns in history, he granted validity to macrohistorical efforts on the scale of Burckhardt's study of the Renaissance, where the interpretive genius of the historian was allowed almost free reign. Arguing against advocates of what has been

<sup>157</sup> *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, p. 4.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

called "historical pointillism" such as Sir Lewis Namier and Tolstoy, he rejected the notion that the ultimate subject matter of history is the smallest possible detail, everything else being an inductive generalization from these fundamental "facts." Instead, he invoked two "laws" that govern historical understanding: the "law of perspective," which posits that

In the micro dimension a more or less dense fabric of given data canalizes the historian's imagination, his interpretative designs. As the distance from the data increases, they become scattered, thin out. The evidence thus loses its binding power, inviting less committed subjectivity to take over.<sup>159</sup>

and the "law of levels," which parallels the cinematic distinction between close-ups and establishing shots, and means that

contexts established at each level are valid for that level but do not apply to findings at other levels; which is to say that there is no way of deriving the regularities of macrohistory, as Toynbee does, from the facts and interpretations provided by micro history.<sup>160</sup>

In stressing the non-homogeneous structure of the historical universe, Kracauer was reinterpreting in historical terms what sociologists as far back as Comte and Durkheim had been advocating: social facts were in some sense generic and thus irreducible to psychological facts. Although not denying the traffic between the various levels, he was stern in warning against the belief in an effortless passage from one to another. In holding that no one level was primary, he contested the views of both psychohistorians and social historians who claim their level is the bedrock of historical analysis. Yet, still very much a champion of the realistic rather than formative tendency, he was anxious to warn against the dangers of an overly abstract and general history. An opponent of unrestrained methodological individualism, he nonetheless warned against the dangers of holism as well. The broadened intelligibility of macro history did not, in fact, mean greater significance for its findings. In history, abstraction ought not to be equated with superior insight. Indeed, "one of the underlying assumptions of the present study" was that "the traditional identification of the extreme abstractions—say, the idea of the 'good' or that of 'justice'—as the most inclusive and essential

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, p. 134.

statements about the nature of things does not apply to history."<sup>161</sup> Yet, it is equally mistaken to expect the accumulated data of microhistorical research eventually to translate into a full and adequate understanding of the past as a whole. Indeed, "the belief in the progress of historiography is largely in the nature of an illusion."<sup>162</sup>

Why then continue to do the monographic research that Carlyle, Nietzsche, Huizinga, Marc Bloch, and so many others have condemned as "dry-as-dust" pendants? The answer Kracauer gave was taken almost directly from Benjamin:

There is only one single argument in its support which I believe to be conclusive. It is a theological argument, though. According to it, the "complete assemblage of the smallest facts" is required for the reason that nothing shall go lost. It is as if the fact-oriented accounts breathed pity with the dead. This vindicates the figure of the collector.<sup>163</sup>

Here the redemption Kracauer sought in so many secular ways was finally allowed an explicitly religious moment.

The non-homogeneity of the historical universe had still further implications, which Kracauer explored in other chapters in the book. In his discussion of the relationship between history and nature and their corresponding methodologies, he admitted the Marxian point that "society is a second nature,"<sup>164</sup> which implies that scientific methods may well be applicable to history. But he also argued that there is an irreducibly contingent element in history which defies schematization. Thus narrative description is equally as valid as social history with its stress on morphological regularities. Similarly, Dilthey's celebrated notion of *Verstehen* still had a place in the historian's methodological arsenal, but it was only one of several approaches that depended on the historical level that was being investigated.

The argument for the present-mindedness of the historian's vision, most notably advanced by Croce and Collingwood, also foundered in the face of the non-homogeneity of the historical universe. Kracauer contended that the historian cannot himself be understood as so embedded in his own period that all of his perceptions of the past are filtered through his current situation. The reason is simply that there is no present "period" to determine the historian's vantage point:

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.



If the historian's "historical and social environment" is not a fairly self-contained whole but a fragile compound of frequently inconsistent endeavors in flux, the assumption that it moulds his mind makes little sense. It does make sense only in the contexts of a philosophy which, like Croce's, hypostatizes a period spirit, claims our dependence on it, and thus determines the mind's place in the historical process from above and without. Seen from within, the relations between the mind and its environment are indeterminate.<sup>165</sup>

The best counter-example is the maverick historian who defies his *Zeitegeist*; Kracauer defines him in now familiar terms:

Vico is an outstanding instance of chronological extra-territoriality; and it would be extremely difficult to derive Burckhardt's complex and ambivalent physiognomy as a historian from the conditions under which he lived and worked. Like great artists or thinkers, great historians are biological freaks: they father the time that has fathered them.<sup>166</sup>

Instead of present-mindedness, Kracauer called for an effort of self-transcendence not unlike Proust's ability to succumb to involuntary memory. The historian must "bracket" himself—note the phenomenological term—and prepare his mind through a kind of surrender, an "active passivity,"<sup>167</sup> which allows the material to reveal itself to him. Although the morphological patterns of history have to be more aggressively pursued, narrative accounts must arise from an expectant openness to the material.

Yet another implication of the heterogeneity of the historical universe was the inadequacy of induction as the sole method of historical inquiry. Following Benjamin's discussion in his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*,<sup>168</sup> Kracauer distinguished between generalizations and what he called "ideas." The latter are "genuine universals" arising out of a leap from the cumulative data of empirical research. They transcend

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>168</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels in Schriften, I* (Frankfurt, 1955). In a review of Kurt Breyssig's *Vom geschichtlichen Werden*, vol. II, (*Die Idee des Gedankens in der Geschichte*), which is contained in the Kracauer *Nachlass* under the category "Old German Manuscripts." Kracauer made a similar critique of induction as the sole mode of historical knowledge. Although no date is affixed, the review appears to be from the Weimar period.

the simple distinction between right and wrong because of their extraordinary power to illuminate the historical landscape:

They are nodal points—points at which the concrete and abstract really meet and become one. Whenever this happens, the flow of indeterminate historical events is suddenly arrested and all that is then exposed to view is seen in the light of an image or conception which takes it out of the transient flow to relate it to one or other of the momentous problems and questions that are forever staring at us.<sup>169</sup>

Burckhardt's image of the Renaissance, Marx's distinction between substructure and superstructure, Weber's Protestant Ethic are examples of "ideas," which later historians have been able to refute in particular cases, but not really lay to rest. Beyond these "ideas" there is a realm—that "last" region referred to in Kracauer's title—that historians dare not enter. Here Kracauer conflated the truths of metaphysics (last in an ontological sense) with the end of history (last in a chronological sense). Because the end of history was unthinkable, it was wrong to expect the historian to possess the vantage point from which metaphysical truth was attainable. Not even universal history, if it can be said to exist, could encompass that ultimate region.

As in film, an overly harmonious rendering of the material is an aesthetic distortion of the open-ended nature of history. Robert Merton's reading of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*<sup>170</sup> captured the impossibility of the task; like Tristram Shandy, the historian has too much to relate before he can get to the end of his tale. If he tries to shortcut the process by arbitrarily calling a halt, he makes the mistake Proust made by withdrawing into his cork-lined room. The result may be artistically successful, but it does inevitable violence to the past as it opens into the future.

Of all the implications of the non-homogeneity of the historical universe, one stands out as central: the nature of historical time. Kracauer, the architect trained more in spatial than temporal terms, had become increasingly preoccupied by the mysteries of time, as we have seen with his insistence on his own chronological anonymity. The first section of *History* to be published, appearing in German, Italian, and

*History: The Last Things Before the Last*, p. 101.

<sup>170</sup> Robert K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript* (New York, 1965). Kracauer communicated his admiration to Merton in a letter, which Merton deeply appreciated. (Letter from Merton to Lili Kracauer, June 28, 1968).

English while Kracauer was still alive,<sup>171</sup> was entitled "Time and History." With minor emendations, it appeared in the book as "Ahaseurus, or the Riddle of Time."

Although he did not work out all the implications of his title, Kracauer did devote one very interesting paragraph to Ahaseurus, the Wandering Jew. After remarking that only this legendary figure might know at first-hand the continuity of history, he described the cost of this knowledge:

How unspeakably terrible he must look! To be sure, his face cannot have suffered from aging, but I imagine it to be many faces, each reflecting one of the periods which he traversed and all of them combining into new patterns, as he restlessly, and vainly, tries on his wanderings to reconstruct out of the times that shaped him the one time he is doomed to incarnate.<sup>172</sup>

The pain distorting the Wandering Jew's face is thus a result of his trying to integrate the different experiences of his life into one coherent pattern. What is also implicit in the story, although Kracauer neglected to develop it, is the fact that Ahaseurus is condemned to eternal life because of his rejection of Jesus. In other words, he is denied the redemption that only death can make possible. He cannot step out of history to touch the eternal. His life will never have any meaning because it will lack an end. To Kracauer, he is thus an ambivalent figure, eternally extraterritorial, and yet possessed of an immortality that most men would envy.

Whatever the implications of his title, which might also be developed in an autobiographical direction, the content of the chapter is crucial for an understanding of Kracauer's position. Among other things, it demonstrates how far Kracauer himself had wandered from the assumptions of German historicism, which were still dominant during his youth. Historicism, either in its Rankean or Hegelian guises, had posited a continuous, developmental flow of chronological time in only one irreversible direction. Homogeneous chronicity was the solvent in which all historical events were immersed. This notion of time was similar to the spatialized, quantitatively ordered temporality of the natural sciences, at least to the extent that both jettisoned the

<sup>171</sup> In German in *Zeugnisse, Theodor W. Adorno zum sechzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Hermann Schweppenhäuser and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt, 1963); in English in *History and Theory*, Beiheft 6 (Middletown, Conn., 1966); in Italian in *Tempo e Presente* (1965).

<sup>172</sup> *History*, p. 157.

transcendental intervention into time preserved in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Even the dialectical process of Hegelian time presupposed a homogeneous, unidirectional medium in which the Absolute manifested itself, although dialectics meant that progress came through contradictions rather than the smooth working out of an evolutionary scheme.

In Germany, this view of time (or rather, the several views which shared a common belief in the homogeneity of the temporal process) had a strong hold on historical thinking well into the twentieth century, despite the crisis in values which befell historicism. Elsewhere, however, especially in modernist aesthetic circles, simultaneity and mythic recurrence were resurrected as legitimate alternatives. Nietzsche and Bergson were, of course, the prophets of the new sense of time, although they were not in perfect agreement on its characteristics. Within the artistic realm, the most sustained exploration of non-historicist time was carried out by Proust in his *Remembrance of Things Past*, although other writers like Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce were also concerned with similar questions. Aesthetic realism, best exemplified by the nineteenth-century novel, was on the defensive, but historical writing, which retained many of the characteristics of the novel (narrative form, omniscient narrator, stress on the public world, etc.), continued to rely on traditional notions of time.

Kracauer saw three implications following from this state of affairs. First, dates within a chronological sequence were value-laden; that is, simultaneous occurrences were implicitly assumed to relate to each other in certain ways, usually parallel, whereas successive events were more often understood as relating to each other in casual ways. Second, large-scale units were often traced over a period of time as if they constituted discrete entities with lives of their own (the classic example being the historicist belief in the state as the true "individual" of history, which implied the neglect of internal social contradictions). And third, the formal property of an inexorable flow was often invested with substantive characteristics, as in Hegel's construction of the world process as the realization of rationality, or the less ambitious, but equally questionable notion of history as progress. All of these assumptions were undermined by a different, more subtle understanding of historical time.

Significantly, in making his case for this alternative view of temporality, Kracauer drew upon the work of art historians like Erwin

Panofsky, George Kubler, and Henri Focillon,<sup>173</sup> with the figure of Burckhardt, the isolated anti-historicist in nineteenth-century German historiography, looming in the background. Of perhaps equal importance was his reading of Proust, which benefitted from Hans Robert Jauss's interpretation of the *Remembrance*.<sup>174</sup> Even more interesting in the context of recent intellectual debates, he found another ally among the anthropologists in the person of Claude Lévi-Strauss. In December, 1963, Kracauer sent him a copy of "Time and History," adding the comment that he had just read *La Pensée Sauvage*

and to my most pleasant surprise discovered that in the wonderful section against Sartre you tackle the issue of historical time in terms similar to mine. To the best of my knowledge, no philosopher or historian has ever discussed the antinomy at the core of chronological time this way. . . . I have well taken note of your hints regarding the problem of the relationships between histories at different levels of generality; I shall discuss this problem in my forthcoming book. One more remark: it will take people a long time to understand your thought in all its consequences.<sup>175</sup>

Lévi-Strauss read the article and wrote back that he "was of course impressed with the many points of contact between your thinking and my own."<sup>176</sup>

What Kracauer liked in Lévi-Strauss's attack on Sartre was his insistence that chronology was itself an arbitrary code that men imposed on the world, rather than an intrinsic part of its essential nature. But in the final version of his chapter on this problem, he moved slightly away from the complete denigration of unilinear flow in the structuralist attack on historicism. As he wrote to the French historian Henri I. Marrou in the spring of 1964:

my agreement with [Lévi-Strauss] and Kubler is only partial. Actually, I am going beyond them and coming closer to your own

173 Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm, 1960); George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London, 1962); Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York, 1963). During the writing of *History*, Kracauer corresponded on several occasions with Panofsky and Kubler, who had been Focillon's student.

174 Hans Robert Jauss, *Zeit und Erinnerung in Marcel Proust's "A la recherche du temps perdu"* (Heidelberg, 1955). See also Jauss's *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt, 1970), p. 195-6, for positive remarks on Kracauer.

175 Kracauer to Lévi-Strauss, December 18, 1963 (original in English).

176 Lévi-Strauss to Kracauer, December 23, 1963 (original in English).

position with its emphasis on the uniform flow of time. As against Kubler-Focillon-Lévi-Strauss, I too affirm the validity of such a flow; but it is true, I also uphold the notion of (Kubler's) "shaped times," assigning to them the same reality character as to that continuous, linear flow, which results in my basic assumptions of the antinomy at the core of Time. Indeed, even as an individual I believe we live in a veritable cataract of times. . . . Since you also speak of the "polyphonic structure" of time, the difference, if any, between our approaches may lie only in the fact that you seem to emphasize more than I do the share of homogeneous chronological time in the historical process, whereas I also stress the significance of the various existing peculiar time sequences and therefore hesitate to identify history as a process.<sup>177</sup>

In the final version of the chapter, the phrases "antinomy at the core of time" and "cataract of times" reappear, as does Kracauer's criticism of the Kubler-Focillon-Lévi-Strauss dismissal of all homogeneous time. Walter Benjamin, who dealt with the same issue in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History,"<sup>178</sup> is upbraided for the same failing:

Benjamin on his part indulges in an undialectical approach; he drives home the nonentity of chronological time without manifesting the slightest concern over the other side of the picture. That there are two sides to it has rarely been recognized.<sup>179</sup>

Proust comes off a bit better, for even while blurring chronology, he was pains to keep it intact.<sup>180</sup> But, as we have already noted, Kracauer saw Proust's attempt to reconcile chronological and shaped, subjective time through an aesthetic, a *posteriori* synthesis as illegitimate. The antinomy between chronological flow and the multitude of shaped times which cut across it is insoluble, or if it can be solved, then only at the very last moment of Time itself. Short of this utopian apocalypse, the temporal visions of the historicists and the modernists are eternally at war.

In his final chapter, entitled "The Anteroom," Kracauer drew certain highly speculative conclusions from his investigation, many of which in

177 Kracauer to Marrou, May 18, 196; (original in English). Kracauer was indebted to Marrou's *De la connaissance historique* (Paris, 1962) and to several of his articles on historical method.

178 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*.

179 *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, p. 155.

180 *ibid.*, p. 162. Kracauer's point is repeated in Roger Shattuck's recent *Modern Masters* Series study, *Proust* (London, 1974), p. 119.



fact were implicit in his earlier work.<sup>181</sup> As we have previously mentioned, he used the metaphor of the anteroom to characterize both photography and history, neither dealing with the "last things" of human concern. Just as there is an insoluble antinomy between chronological and shaped time, so one exists between the anteroom and what for want of a better term we may call the inner sanctum into which it may lead. The particular, contingent truths of history, which relate to the *Lebenswelt*, are different in kind from the universal truths sought by philosophy. Attempts to historicize philosophy in a radical way, whether in Hegelian, Diltheyan, or Heideggerian terms, fail to observe the boundary between the two spheres. Such immanentist absolutizations of the historical, which culminate in Hans-Georg Gadamer and the so-called hermeneutics movement,<sup>182</sup> lead to a theodicy in which history becomes a success story. But the alternative of situating philosophical truths completely outside of history as transcendental and eternal verities is equally erroneous. Both the immanentists and the transcendentalists fail to meet the challenge of relativism raised by historical consciousness because of their outmoded views of time. Because of the antinomous character of time,

there are "pockets" and voids amidst these temporal currents, vaguely reminiscent of interference phenomena. This leads me to speak, in a provisional way, of the "limited" relativity of certain ideas emerging from such pockets. . . . Philosophical truths have a double aspect. Neither can the timeless be stripped of the vestiges of temporality, nor does the temporal wholly engulf the timeless. Rather, we are forced to assume that the two aspects of truths exist side by side, relating to each other in ways which I believe to be theoretically undefinable. Something like an analogy may be found in the "complementarity principle" of the quantum physicists.<sup>183</sup>

This insight, Kracauer believed, was best exemplified in the work of Burckhardt, who sought absolutes, but was sensitive to their ambiguities amidst the flux of historical change.

In getting us past the anteroom, however, Kracauer was no real help. The "side" he was concerned with in his "side-by-side" principle was clearly that of the *Lebenswelt*, for it was the anteroom "in which we breathe, move and live."<sup>184</sup> In trying to redeem this contingent and

181 The essay in which many of these ideas are most clearly adumbrated is "Die Wartenden," *FZ* (March 12, 1922); reprinted in *Das Ornament der Masse*.

182 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960).

183 *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, p. 199-200.

184 *ibid.*, p. 195.

ephemeral world, the historian approaches the state Kafka attributed to Sancho Panza as that of a "free man" who dwells in a "utopia of the in-between—a terra incognita in the hollows between the lands we know."<sup>185</sup> To Kracauer, the best model for this type of intellectual stance was Erasmus, who followed the "middle way" as the "direct road to Utopia—the way of the humane."<sup>186</sup>

As an epilogue to *History*, Kracauer's editors appended a quotation from Kierkegaard that Kafka had cited and Kracauer had especially liked. In essence, it praises the simple man who defies the conventions of the world to remain true to his personal vision. The quotation is prefaced by an injunction that Kracauer himself had followed throughout his long and uneven career:

Focus on the "genuine" hidden in the interstices between dogmatized beliefs of the world, thus establishing tradition of lost causes; giving names to the hitherto unnamed.<sup>187</sup>

The book's epilogue is a just epilogue to Kracauer's own life's work. *History*, despite its stress on non-homogeneity and fragmentation, or more correctly through its justification for that stress, gives a meaning to the checkered corpus of Kracauer's writings. In Sartrean terms, it "totalizes" the disparate elements of his work by revealing their inherent relatedness, without, however, reducing them to a single common denominator. It does this not merely by spelling out the implicit vision behind them, but also by placing certain of his books in a juxtaposition that turns their individual weaknesses into a composite strength. Thus *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Jacques Offenbach and his Time*, if looked at solely on their own terms, can be faulted for ignoring what Kracauer called the non-homogeneous structure of the historical universe. That is, both of them assume a somewhat simplistic and unmediated correspondence between social and cultural phenomena. The "shaped time" of the cinema and operetta are not differentiated to any real extent from the "shaped time" of Weimar and Second Empire society. Within the works, this is surely a shortcoming, as many critics were quick to notice. But set side by side with *Theory of Film*, where the immanent development of film is traced with scarcely any reference to social developments, *From Caligari to Hitler* seems less one-dimensional. Although no comparable book was written by Kracauer dealing with Offenbach's music in a solely musical context, the argument of *History*

185 *ibid.*, p. 217.

186 *ibid.*, p. 14.

187 *ibid.*, p. 219.

suggests that he would have recognized its validity alongside of his "Gesellschaftsbiographie." Similarly, *History* puts into greater balance his concern for flux and process informing *inter alia* *Theory of Film* (criticized by commentators like Parker Tyler for its overly Heraclitean bias)<sup>188</sup> with his somewhat more muted desire for stable values and order, which is apparent in his constant lament over the emptiness of modern life. It also allows us to view his earlier difficulties defining realism in *Theory of Film* with some understanding, for his several usages correspond to a reality which is itself multidimensional.

*History* also helps make sense of his strangely ambivalent attitude towards Marxism, which has continued to be a source of debate among his interpreters. Like so many of his contemporaries, Kracauer underwent a clear movement to the right during his exile in America. By the 1960's, so Kristeller remembers,<sup>189</sup> he was strongly hostile to the New Left and all it represented. In 1932, he could write that he was an advocate of Marxism and would continue to be one, but in *History*, Marxism came in for a large share of criticism. His basic complaint was that Marx, like Hegel before him, had succumbed to the magic of linear chronology. (Ironically, this charge was levelled at the same time that Louis Althusser in France was discovering a sensitivity to shaped times in the later Marx.)<sup>190</sup> To Kracauer, the humanist, even existentialist Marx championed by Sartre and others was far less important than the naturalist Marx who tried to apply scientific method to history and failed.

And yet, despite his clear shift to a kind of disillusioned liberalism, many of these same attitudes can be seen even during the Weimar period. In distrusting the idealistic Marxism of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, Kracauer expressed his doubts about the Hegelian legacy in Marx's own writings, although he preferred to minimize it. In the 1960s, he still disapproved of Hegelianizing Marx, but now he admitted that both thinkers shared a fallacious view of time. What went along with this disapproval was a caution about the role of *praxis* in reshaping the world; the elegiac lethargy of *Ginster* went hand in hand with a view of Marx as a naturalist. It was not surprising that he would take Lévi-Strauss's side in his dispute with Sartre.

188 Parker Tyler, *Sex Psyche Etcetera in the Film*, p. 122.

189 Conversation with Professor Kristeller, New York, September 5, 1973.

190 Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London, 1969), p. 134-137. Althusser's discussion is not specifically on Marx here, but on the dialectical notion of time in a play by Bertalozzi. In *Reading Capital*, written with Etienne Balibar, trans. Ben Brewster (New York, 1970), Althusser specifically deals with the concept of non-homogenous time in Marx himself. (p. 99f).

*History* is also illuminating in this regard because it helps us situate him more precisely in the context of his friendships with Benjamin, Bloch, and Adorno. As we have seen, Benjamin's distinction between "ideas" and generalities, his justification for the "collector," and his critique of unilinear time are all cited with approval by Kracauer, although the last is criticized for ignoring the place of chronological time as one stream in the cataract. But what is absent is Benjamin's guarded optimism about achieving fulfilled, utopian time (what Benjamin called *Jetztzeit*).<sup>191</sup> The side of Benjamin that had responded positively to Brecht was completely closed to Kracauer, who endorsed Gershom Scholem's appraisal of the pathological character of that relationship.<sup>192</sup> In a letter to Rolf Tiedemann, who had just written a study of Benjamin, Kracauer wrote that he shared certain of Benjamin's ideas about history:

that nothing should be lost, that history must be shattered in order to find its actual content in details, and so forth. Other thoughts—such as his emphasis on surrealism—I considered bizarre. And I have always regretted that he hadn't seen the dialectic between the reality, in which we live, and the messianic end reality (which only plays a negative role for me).<sup>193</sup>

This negative attitude towards a utopian future also colored Kracauer's intellectual relationship to Bloch. Personally, the two men were on the best of terms in the years before Kracauer's death. The earlier friction over Kracauer's late Weimar politics had long since been forgotten. In fact, a still older dispute between them, which broke out in 1922, when Kracauer criticized Bloch's *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* and Bloch answered in his *Durch die Wüste*, was also patched over, so much so that Bloch removed his rebuttal from the new edition of the book in 1964.<sup>194</sup> When Bloch's *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie* I had appeared in the previous year, Kracauer had approvingly written: "You are to my knowledge the only one who presents the problem of time. And what you say about it strongly touches my own ideas on the antinomy at the center of the chronological

<sup>191</sup> Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," p. 263.

<sup>192</sup> Gershom Scholem, "Walter Benjamin," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (New York, 1965). On May 23, 1965, Kracauer wrote to Scholem that he shared his view on Benjamin's Marxism, adding "I once had a very heated argument with him in Berlin over Benjamin's slavish masochistic attitude (Haltung) towards Brecht."

<sup>193</sup> Kracauer to Tiedemann, February 21, 1966. To Lowenthal, he had complained years before of Benjamin's tendency towards "messianic dogmatism." (Letter of January 6, 1957.)

<sup>194</sup> *Durch die Wüste* (Frankfurt, 1964).

concept of time."<sup>195</sup> Further evidence of their mutual affection appeared in Kracauer's contribution to a volume of tributes to Bloch in 1965.<sup>196</sup> In his essay, which took the form of a letter to Bloch, Kracauer stressed the side of Bloch's utopianism that was most amenable to him: its conservative, redemptive dimension. Bloch's love of narrative, which Benjamin had also shared, meant an awareness of continuities, even amidst the most radical changes. Bloch was thus superior to conceptual utopians who want to impose a rational form on the future, which severs it completely from the past. Bloch also possessed a laudable sensitivity to the concrete, material realities of the sensuous world; "you preserve something of the magic of things," Kracauer wrote, "which you disenchant."<sup>197</sup>

And yet behind the expression of solidarity was a clear acknowledgment of the distance between them. Kracauer identified himself with Sancho Panza, who was short of breath trying to keep up with Bloch's Quixotic race towards utopia. Significantly, he appended the section on Erasmus later published in his introduction to *History* as a "gift" to Bloch. Erasmus's utopia, that of the middle way, the way of the humane, was not, however, Bloch's, which called for a far more radical transformation of man and society. Without any actual filiation. Kracauer's reading of Erasmus came close to that of an old enemy. Stefan Zweig, whose *Triumph und Tragik des Erasmus von Rotterdam* (1934)<sup>198</sup> also praised Erasmus's anti-extremism and moderation. In 1937, Georg Lukács had taken Zweig to task in *The Historical Novel* for advocating Erasmian non-revolutionary, pseudo-humanism.<sup>199</sup> Erasmus's position was suspect, Lukács argued, because it was grounded in an elitist condemnation of the masses as irrational. Although Bloch had his own quarrels with Lukács, it seems likely that the champion of Thomas Münzer would have shared some of his qualms about the adequacy of Erasmian utopianism.

If Kracauer's disillusionment about Marxist utopianism distanced him from Benjamin and Bloch, the opposite complaint was partly responsible for his growing estrangement from Adorno in the last years

195 Kracauer to Bloch, June 17, 1963.

196 Kracauer, "Zwei Deutungen in zwei Sprachen," in *Ernst Bloch zu Ehren; Beiträge zu seinem Werk*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt, 1965).

197 *ibid.*, p. 146.

198 Stefan Zweig, *Triumph und Tragik des Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Vienna, 1934). Kracauer's distaste for Zweig's type of biography was expressed in his 1930 piece "Die Biographie als neubürgerliche Kunstform," reprinted in *Das Ornament des Mass*.

199 Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston, 1963), p. 266-69. For a discussion of the Zweig-Lukács dispute, see Albert William Levi, *Humanism and Politics* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1969).

of his life. Although I hope to give a detailed account of the complicated course of their friendship elsewhere, certain points can be derived from a reading of *History* alone, which should be made here. In his anteroom chapter, Kracauer devoted half a paragraph to Adorno's recently published *Negative Dialektik*,<sup>200</sup> which advocated a radically anti-ontological position without any first principles or fixed points of reference. To Kracauer, this was an "unfettered dialectics" with unfortunate consequences:

His rejection of any ontological stipulation in favor of an infinite dialectics which penetrates all concrete things and entities seems inseparable from a certain arbitrariness, an absence of content and direction in these series of material evaluations. The concept of Utopia is then necessarily used by him in a purely formal way, as a borderline concept which at the end invariably emerges like a *deus ex machina*. But Utopian thought makes sense only if it assumes the form of a vision or intuition with a definite content of a sort. Therefore the radical immanence of the dialectical process will not do; some ontological fixations are needed to imbue it with significance and direction.<sup>201</sup>

In other words, whereas Kracauer faulted Bloch and Benjamin for their hopes of realizing utopia in history, he attacked Adorno for eliminating ontology and utopia entirely. In his own thinking, history and ontology exist side by side, but still separately. Their co-existence, like that of the general and the particular, can only be defined by what he called "fact"<sup>202</sup> in each specific case.

Although raising an interesting objection to Adorno's negative dialectics, which has left many readers suspended in a conceptual whirl, Kracauer's alternative failed to answer a number of questions. Although chastising Adorno for lacking a utopia "that assumes the form of a vision or intuition with a definite content of a sort," he never really offered one himself. Without any of that belief in dealienation or the reconciliation of man and nature that animated Marxist Humanism, Kracauer fell back on a vague and general endorsement of Erasmian tolerance and flexibility. This may well be a posture worthy of emulation, but it is scarcely a utopian vision. Similarly, his advocacy of "fact" as a means to regulate the relationship between history and

200 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York, 1973).

201 *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, p. 201.

202 *ibid.*, pps. 200 and 206.



ontology, the general and the particular, is not very instructive. Kracauer assumed

that speculations on the total nature of the universe are called for, or indeed indispensable, as gambles in Kafka's sense. They meaningfully enter the scene on (unpredictable) occasions and then presumably fulfill a vital function.<sup>203</sup>

But what the occasions were, which speculations are superior to others, and what functions they fulfilled Kracauer could not say. There is, in short, a phenomenon here which might be called "metaphysical fellow-travelling": a belief in ontology and utopia without any specific content, a recognition of the legitimacy of ultimate thoughts without the daring to think them out loud, a belief that relativism can be overcome by the "pockets" of the absolute that exist in the interstices of chronological time, without speculating on the contents of the pockets.

Kracauer was surely right to point to the antinomies of time and the non-homogeneity of the historical universe. His efforts throughout his career to reawaken our sensitivity to the phenomenal *Lebenswelt* often lost amidst a welter of conceptual generalizations were equally laudable. His sober defiance of ideological panaceas, although uncomfortably close to the end-of-ideology fantasy of the 1950's, also merits respect. But despite these achievements, what leaves the observer of Kracauer's career uneasy is his tendency to freeze the posture of extra-territoriality and chronological anonymity, which he had made a personal virtue. into a universal condition incapable of change. What Arnheim called the "melancholy surrender"<sup>204</sup> in Kracauer's championing of cinematic realism was a leitmotif of his entire career, despite the utopian intentions of *History*. Adorno certainly exaggerated when he wrote that "in the treasure of motives in his thought one would have looked in vain for outrage against reification,"<sup>205</sup> but there was a grain of truth in the charge. Ginsterism may be a sensible reaction to certain circumstances, but it need not be made a model for all times. Nor is the mask of Sancho Panza the only one men can use if they are to avoid the follies of Don Quixote. In short, Kracauer's "side-by-side" principle may accurately represent the best hope in an era without integral meaning and real human community, but who is to say that his era is the last we shall experience in human history?

203 *ibid.*, p. 200.

204 Arnheim, "Melancholy Unshaped," p. 191.

205 Adorno, "Der wunderliche Realist," p. 107.

## The Makers

BY HOWARD NEMEROV

Who can remember back to the first poets,  
The greatest ones, greater even than Orpheus?  
No one has ever remembered that far back  
Or now considers, among the artifacts  
And bones and cantilevered inference  
The past is made of, those first and greatest poets,  
So lofty and disdainful of renown  
They left us not a name to know them by.

They were the ones that in whatever tongue  
Worded the world, that were the first to say  
Star, water, stone, that said the visible  
And made it bring invisibles to view  
In wind and time and change, and in the mind  
Itself that minded the hitherto idiot world  
And spoke the speechless world and sang the towers  
Of the city into the astonished sky.

They were the first great listeners, attuned  
To interval, relationship and scale,  
The first to say above, beneath, beyond,  
Conjurors with love, death, sleep, with bread and wine,  
Who having uttered vanished from the world  
Leaving no memory but the marvelous  
Magical elements, the breathing shapes  
And stops of breath we build our Babels of.